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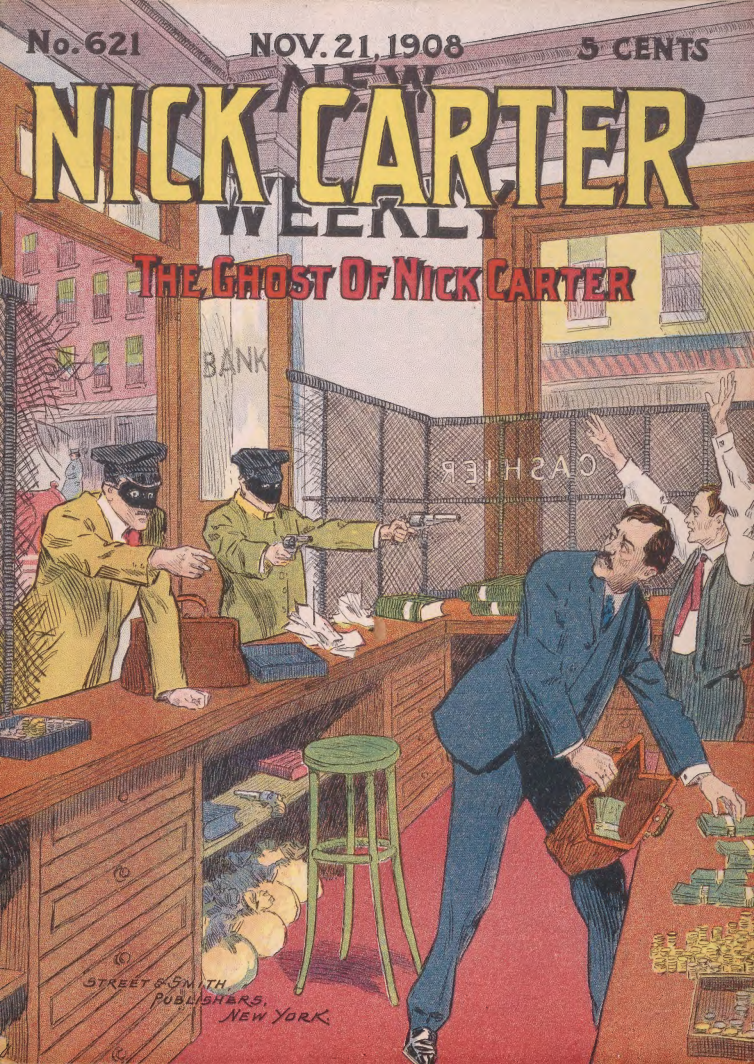
NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

THE GHOST OF NICK CARTER



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NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

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THE GHOST OF NICK CARTER

OR,

THE SECRET OF THE SECOND SIGHT SEER.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

THE HOLD-UP.

West Farms is a scattered settlement around an ugly, sprawling "square," through which criss-cross the tracks of the Westchester trolleys, and those running between the menagerie entrance to the Bronx Park and the Harlem Bridge.

Until the Bronx Park became a fact West Farms was as countrified a section as one might easily find within twenty miles of New York City Hall. Now it is quite metropolitan, with an elevated train structure, electric lights, and a real German beer garden.

It has an added urban institution. On a prominent angle of the border of the square stands a cement-block building as severely plain and stable-looking as an armory—only on a small scale—in the arch of the doorway of which is chiseled: Grangers' State Bank.

On pleasant week-days, holidays and Sundays, there are plenty of people in the open square before the door of the Grangers' Bank. On a drizzly afternoon, about three o'clock, which describes the time of our story, there are more limp-tailed hens to be seen in West Farms square than human beings!

The Grangers' Bank is well patronized, for there are many small depositors, as well as large firms, within a mile or so of the building. Notably, the payrolls of several contracting firms and factories are made up at the Grangers' Bank, which sends to the city institutions for the funds, for a small commission.

It chanced to be a Monday afternoon. The next day was pay-day for the Burlington Contracting Company, the hair-sieve factory up toward Westchester, and the Cannister & Partridge Company, which, alone, paid a thousand men weekly.

The regular banking hours of the institution were just over; but the messenger and janitor, Miles McCormack, had not locked the outer door.

In fact, he was busy, with the more important members of the banking force, in counting packets of small bills, rolls of silver coin, nickels and pennies, and bags of gold eagles and half-eagles.

This money was spread out upon the marble slabs behind the strong screens that guarded the space before the clerks' desks and the yawning mouth of the fire and burglar-proof vault which was built against the rear wall of the bank building.

It was a busy scene, and every man in the place was hard at work, with coats off, cuffs turned back, and most of them wearing shades over their eyes, for it was so dull an afternoon that the electric lights had to be turned on over the tables where the money was being counted.

Scarcely a word was spoken saving now and then when certain of the packets, marked and recorded, were read aloud by one to be verified by his fellow worker. President Ombry, Cashier Perriton, and

bookkeeper Olds was helping the two clerks, and McCormack) and were working as hard as any of their subordinates.

Suddenly the exhaust of a heavy automobile disturbed the silence of the bank, where the clink of coin had been the only sound for some few moments. A machine came to the curb directly opposite the bank door, and stopped. There were two persons in it. Both got out, left the machine chugging, and came instantly into the banking-room.

Both visitors were dressed as became automobilists, in long dust-coats, caps, and masks. One was a much taller man than the other and carried a collapsible case of some kind in his hand which he proceeded to set down heavily upon the floor.

His slighter companion walked several feet away and took up a position facing the men behind the screen, and just at the point where the screen in front of the teller's shelf joinetl the solid partition of the president's private office. The marble shelf was piled with coin and bank-notes. Cashier Perriton wrote some figures on a slip for reference, and then came to the small window and asked:

"What do you want, gentlemen? Banking hours are over."

The tall man was stooping over his black case. To the surprise of Perriton he opened the thing and drew forth, one after the other, like the inner boxes of a Chinese puzzle, two other bags, or cases, both nearly as large as the outside case.

"Sorry to trouble you so late, sir," said the man, rising quickly to a standing position. "But we have come for cash."

"Who for?" asked Perriton, in a low voice, still suspecting nothing.

"For ourselves, mister," returned the man, and, laying hold of the screen in front of Perriton's surprised face, he jerked it outward and the whole partition of steel wire came away in his hands, and he flung it behind him on the floor!

This astonishing act left the way clear to the shelf piled with money. It likewise enabled the slighter of the two strangers to lean suddenly into the banking-office proper and push a revolver in each hand into the faces of President Ombry and bookkeeper Olds.

"Draw a gun, move to thwart us, or cry out, gentlemen, and the two men under my partner's guns will be dead instantly!" exclaimed the bold highwayman, in a cold voice.

"Stand where you are, sir," he added, to Perriton, who had started back. "You can be seen from the street, I know. If you make any sign to those who pass I will risk everything to kill you! You fellows back there, if you value the lives of your companions, obey orders!"

As quickly as he spoke, his actions were even quicker. He had seized one of his collapsible bags, held it before him, and scooped it full of bills and coin-rolls while he spoke, reaching boldly in under the very noses of the amazed and frightened bank employes to do it!

The amazement of the banking force equaled their fright. The highwaymen had chosen the best possible way to keep the cashier, two clerks, and McCormack from moving. If they tried to fight the robbers they would sacrifice the lives of the president and bookkeeper!

Within reach of Perriton, the cashier, was a loaded revolver, but he dared not move, for he was directly under the eagle eye of the taller robber.

This latter went about his business in the coolest possible way. He stooped for a second bag and tossed it over to McCormack, who, with the two clerks, had been working at the shelf behind the teller's, and all three with their backs to the entrance of the banking-room.

This shelf was a marble slab, too; but it was hung on heavy hinges and was braced up by patent swing-brackets. The shelf could be dropped against the partition when not in use, and so make the space behind the teller, or cashier, wider.

"Scoop up that cash there and fill the bag, *you!*" commanded the chief robber, to McCormack. "Don't dilly-dally about it!"

But the messenger of the bank was a nervy fellow after all. He had no weapon, nor could he reach the burglar-alarm signal, or the telephone; but he determined to delay the robbers and save some of the cash if possible.

As he seized the bag under the highwayman's stern eye, he managed to kick aside one of the swing-bracket props of the marble slab, with his knee. The entire weight of the marble, and the money—mostly in coin—came upon the other bracket. And he leaned his own weight upon it, too, as he appeared to reach to scramble the money into the bag.

"Crash!"

The second bracket was torn from the partition and the shelf fell, the money coming to the floor like a load of coal dumped down an areaway!

The noise made the windows rattle! It must have been heard out on the street.

With less nervy men than these two remarkable robbers the crash would have been the signal for a wild scramble to get away. But, although the slighter man started and, for an instant, his pistols quivered, a word from his mate calmed him.

"Steady!" growled this persistent individual.

"That was a trick—confound you!" he said, accusing McCormack with a pointed finger. "Back up there into the safe—and *you*, and *you*, and *you!* All of you, now! No hesitation, or I'll scatter your brains about here worse than that money is scattered!"

He had pulled a gun himself now, and it seemed to each of the clerks, to Perriton, and to McCormack, as though the wicked muzzle of the thing was aimed only at *his* head. They could see nothing but its gaping muzzle. They obeyed his order like lambs, and backed into the mouth of the vault.

"Those two fellows, too!" commanded the bigger robber, motioning toward Olds and Ombry, but never taking his gun, or eye, off the bunch in the electric-lighted safe.

His mate waved the president and bookkeeper backward. As though in a trance, the two men, who had been looking down revolver barrels so long that their eyes were crossed, backed into the vault likewise.

The smaller robber held them there—the whole six men! It was a ridiculous position; yet no man wanted to make the first move and risk his own and his companions' lives.

The two pistols in the little man's hands might be emptied within a few seconds into the vault, and scarcely one of the helpless banking people could escape injury or death!

The chief robber put up his own gun, went swiftly to the end of the open space from which the wire-screen had been so strangely removed, reached in and snapped open the lock of the gate. He entered without obstruction into the enclosure, rushed quickly to the vault front, crouching so as not to interpose his own bulk between his partner's pistols and the cowering men in the safe, and banged to the inner, and then the outer vault door!

It locked with a clang. The helpless men were shut into its maw. And it was a time-lock, set only to open each twenty-four hours at eight-thirty o'clock in the forenoon!

CHAPTER II.

THE CURL-PAPER.

"Now, what do you think of *that?*" demanded Patsy, Nick Carter's sharp young assistant, as he entered the office and found Chick scratching away at a letter.

"What's happened to you now, Patsy?" asked Chick, looking up and noting his young friend's dissatisfied expression of countenance.

"What do you think?"

"By Jove! You didn't miss the girl?"

"Well, that's what I just did!" cried Patsy belligerently. "And it wasn't my fault."

"Got an excuse, have you, Patsy?"

"That's all right. I did what I was told," growled Patsy.

"You were told to spot the girl as she left the Tombs, and follow her till you got the number of her room for the night. Is that a fact?"

"All right."

"And you couldn't do a simple thing like that?" queried Chick, with scorn.

"Holy mackerel!" ejaculated Patsy. "I didn't suppose I was to be down there at the Tombs before breakfast!"

"What's that?"

"She was let out before eight o'clock. It was a special order. I tell you, Chick, we've been fooled. Somebody pulled a wire that we had not grounded. There's been influence exercised in this case."

Chick sat back in Nick's chair now and gazed at the other reflectively.

"Tell me all about it, Patsy," he said. "You have evidently had an experience."

"Huh! I should say I had!"

"Out with it, before it chokes you," advised Chick.

"Why, we had the tip that Ina Corrette, remanded by the judge because the Kennans went to Europe instead of pressing the charge against her,* had got her bail reduced to a nominal sum and that some philanthropic soul had been found to put up the cash for her freedom. But she was to be freed at the usual time this morning. Now, I never heard of a bailed prisoner getting out of the Tombs before nine o'clock—did you?"

"I can't say I ever did," admitted Chick slowly.

"Well, *she* did."

"Sure she didn't go last night?"

"Positive. I was there last night. I've a friend—a keeper—on her row of cells. He said he'd let me know if anybody came to see her. But nobody did.

"Of course, she could have received letters on the sly. You know very well that there is a sort of Free Masonry between prisoners, and they help each other in small ways like that."

"But who got her out so early this morning?" asked Chick.

"My friend says the office sent in for her just after rising-bell. She was up and dressed, had her bag packed and all. She expected the early summons. My friend had no chance to telephone me. And there was no delaying the girl. She walked out; she wasn't two minutes in the office. An old lady in a poke-bonnet—one of these 'jail angels'—met her at the door and they walked away together. And there I came along an hour too late for the fair!" concluded Patsy, in great disgust.

"What you been doing since?" demanded Chick, looking at his watch. "It's near two o'clock."

"What do you suppose I've been doing?" snarled Patsy. "Sitting out here on the curbstone, sucking my thumb, and afraid to come into the house?"

At that Chick Carter laughed long and loudly.

"It isn't any laughing matter," declared the disgruntled Patsy. "I've been trying to pick up Ina Corrette's trail, of course, and I've had a nice chase. Holy mackerel! but she must have had outside help—sure she must! If we hadn't seen that old faker, Addison, or Siddel, or Crummles, or whatever his name was, do the Casibianca act in that fire up-town, I'd believe that he was looking out for Ina again."

"Humph!" muttered Chick thoughtfully.

Patsy eyed him suspiciously a minute, and then broke forth again:

"I don't believe you think the seer of second sight is dead even now, old man!"

*See NICK CARTER WEEKLY, No. 620.

"I don't know what to think," said Chick thoughtfully.

The matter had often troubled him. The fact that Nick Carter himself still remained under cover and had not reappeared in the world again, made Chick more than a little suspicious regarding the death of the famous Professor Addison.

It had been a notable case. For once in his life Nick Carter, famous detective as he was, had seemed to run up against a snag!

The first time his attention had been called to Professor Addison, the seer of second sight, that mysterious individual had penetrated Nick's disguises, and, not only that, but he seemed to know in advance all Nick's plans, and the very conferences which were held between the detective and his assistants.

So deeply was Nick convinced that Addison had a secret way of informing himself of the particulars of his—Nick's—plans, that the detective resorted to the desperate remedy of apparently dying and being buried, to escape the surveillance of this powerful and wicked man!

In this desperate enterprise Nick had the aid of his assistants, and of a certain Doctor Menlow, an old friend and a hypnotist of considerable power.

Nick did not for a moment believe that Professor Addison had any further power of "second sight" than that he could make his subject, a beautiful young girl named Ina Corrette, go into a trance and see, in her mental vision, just what Addison willed her to see. But Addison certainly had some marvelous way of learning what went on in Nick's house.

So Nick had taken Chick away into the park, in a lonely place, and there detailed his plans to him. Doctor Menlow, a medical practitioner called Boling, and a friendly undertaker, were called into the game.

Nick apparently had heart failure on the street, and was taken home. He was attended by the physician and pronounced in a dangerous situation.

So well did he feign the disease from which he was supposed to suffer, that a strange physician, bribed by Addison, saw Nick and even signed his death-certificate.

But in feigning death Nick had been helped materially by Doctor Menlow, the hypnotist, who threw the detective into a deep sleep, from which he had not been aroused until after he was *actually buried!*

The burial took place in Nick's private cemetery on the old Carter place. There was a disused tomb nearby, and a tunnel had been dug by Patsy and Danny from the grave to the tomb, through which the revived Nick escaped.

Then in the guise of Doctor Menlow himself—who had taken a trip to Europe—Nick was enabled to reappear among men and to work secretly against Addison and his confederates, and to govern the activities of his own assistants.

The great detective's first task was to run down Addison's girl confederate, Ina Corrette, the "subject" whom the seer of second sight used in his seances before they were broken up.

Ina had boldly stolen from Mr. and Mrs. George Kenman, wealthy society people, a box containing fifty thousand dollars' worth of gems. She had been forced to disgorge the gems and she had gone to jail to await trial. Nick did not appear, of course, in this transaction.

Then Addison's former life—or a part of it, at least—became known to the detectives. As Eugene Siddel he had once been the valued laboratory assistant of a great scientist and inventor, Doctor Morray. The scientist had recently died under peculiar circumstances that led his friends to believe that he had been poisoned in some strange way.

The scientist left in trust with a certain Alonzo B. Peckham, for his heirs, papers of great value, explaining the theory and system of his life-work—the discovery of a certain so-called "ray." This ray, or power, properly applied through a special apparatus, enabled the user to see and hear through any material matter.

A brick wall became transparent under the manipulation of the Morray Discovery. Not only that, but perfect photographs of persons and events might be taken through a solid substance, and the human voice recorded intelligibly on the cylinders of the phonograph.

As Eugene Siddel—later known as Addison, and Crummles—had stolen the only mechanism, or apparatus, that Doctor Morray had ever had built with which to develop his ray, it was the expressed opinion of Nick Carter that, flighty as the thing appeared, it must have been by the use of this wonderful invention that Addison had so easily kept tabs on him, Nick, before his supposed demise!

But Addison was not satisfied with the possession of the machine. He needed the written notes left by Doctor Morray to enable him to make broad use of the invention.

He therefore laid a successful plot to rob Alonzo B. Peckham of the said notes. It was done in broad daylight, but by chance Patsy obtained an inkling of the affair, and learned where Addison—under still another alias—was living. With the help of Nick's Irish chauffeur, Danny, Patsy made some pertinent inquiries regarding Addison's affairs, and about the lost papers, which Addison had secreted in the wall of the room in the house he occupied.

When Chick, Patsy, and Danny endeavored to obtain these papers, Addison blew up the house, destroying the papers, and after killing his own servant whom he believed had been unfaithful to him.

In the fire Addison was supposed to have lost his life. But, as he could have been held for murder had he been captured, as well as for the robbery of the valuable papers from Mr. Peckham, Nick Carter had had some suspicion regarding Addison's actual demise.

"As soon as I can communicate with Doctor Men-

low and make arrangements to do so, I will return to the haunts of the living," Nick had told his assistants, with a smile. "Meanwhile do you watch Ina Corrette when she is allowed her freedom. She may be worth watching."

"And *this* is how you watch her, is it?" said Chick, looking rather glumly at Patsy, when that young man had made the above report.

"Aw, say! don't croak," said Patsy. "I did the best I could. I hung around for a while, expecting her to show up. By and by I went in and passed the high sign for my friend. When he showed up he told me what had happened. I felt like going in and talking straight to his nobs! He might have known that when a prisoner gets released and wants to make such an early get-away, that there's something queer about it.

"I learned he was told that Ina was a pippin, and that some of the Johnnies were hanging around—or might be—for a look at her when she came out. Anyway, she got off early, and there I was adrift. But I spotted the poke-bonnet that took her away. The woman keeper put me wise to her. The 'angel' is straight goods, all right. No doubt she does a whole lot of good to those that are worthy. But this time she's been done—oh, yes, done for fair!" declared Patsy.

"Lemme tell you, Chick! I went up to her house and saw her. She was sitting down in her parlor with her poke-bonnet and mits on, all ready to go out."

"'Where's the girl?' says I.

"'I don't know you, young man,' says she. 'If you are a reporter and want to talk to Miss Corrette, I beg you to let the poor creature alone. Do not flaunt her name in the papers. She wishes to turn over a new leaf and begin her life anew.'

"'She does, does she, ma'am?' says I. 'I'm happy to hear it, I do assure you! So she's going to stay here with you?'

"'Oh, no! She will go away to a quiet place I have prepared for her,' says the lady philanthropist.

"'Great!' says I. 'I can't see her at all, then?'

"'Well, she is not in just at present,' admits the poke-bonnet lady.

"Gee! I was wise in a minute.

"'How long since she skiddooed?' I asks.

"'She went out to make some small purchases in the neighborhood.'

"'You trust 'em out alone, do you?' says I.

"'Young man,' says she, real solemn, *'trust* is the basis of all help in such cases. Show confidence in them——'

"'That's what the man said before he lost his watch,' says I. 'But excuse *me*, I don't believe in locking the door after the horse is stolen. How long since Miss Corrette flew the coop?'

"She looked mad. Then she hesitated and flushed all over her wrinkled, quiet face.

"'Why, young man! I'd forgotten the time, talking with you. She should have been in before this.'

"'Let's go and hunt for her,' says I. 'Where was she going first?'

"Well, it was hard on the old party. That confidence game was a pet idea of hers. But with some urging she consented to make a round of the shops in the neighborhood on a still hunt for little Ina. Did little Ina show up? Not much she didn't. Little Ina had taken French leave.

"I convinced the old lady—and myself—that such was the fact," continued Patsy, "and then I took a run down to the prison again. I had a confab with the woman keeper. She let me search Ina's cell.

"And here," declared Patsy dramatically, bringing forth something from his pocket and laying it on the table before Chick, "is the only thing I could find that looked enough like a clue to be related to it by marriage!"

"What the deuce is it, anyway?" demanded Chick, picking up the crumpled bit of paper. "Looks like a curl-paper."

"Right the first guess!" exclaimed Patsy, with a grin. "Shows you're used to female society, Chick!"

"It *is* a curl-paper?"

"And it *was* Ina's. She put up her hair last night, in readiness for her flitting this morning."

"Hullo!" exclaimed Chick. "There's writing here."

"Rather!" declared Patsy. "That's the clue."

"What's this?" murmured Chick, eying the scrawled line on the wrinkled paper sharply. Then he repeated: "'Pull off the West Farms lay first.' Humph! Sounds funny."

"Don't it? Makes me laugh a whole lot," returned Patsy, with a suddenly serious face. "I tell you, Chick, that girl has got a confederate on the outside."

"Then it's my opinion that Addison was not burned up in that fire," said Chick.

"Maybe not. However, she was in communication with some crook outside while she was in jail. That message was plainly a notification of what they were to do the first thing when she came out——"

"Hold on! Isn't that jumping at conclusions with a vengeance?" cried Chick.

"Maybe. But I bet you that we hear of something being pulled off at West Farms before twenty-four hours are gone."

"Let's see—that's out in the Bronx?"

"It is."

"We'll look the place over. Ring for Joseph. Send for Danny and the car. We'll run out right now and see what chance there is out there of anything like Ina Corrette turning up," and Chick laughed.

"Laugh if you like, old man. There's going to be something doing, as sure as fate!" declared Patsy, as he ran to obey orders.

CHAPTER III.

THE MEN IN THE VAULT.

Chick had laughed; but he more than half-agreed with Patsy.

Chick had had considerable experience with Miss Ina Corrette. Her whirlwind experiment as highwayman, wherein she had stopped the Kennans' automobile and robbed those gentlefolk of fifty thousand dollars' worth of jewels, was still fresh in Chick's mind.

The girl had a coolness and sang-froid that were marvelous to contemplate.

She could not yet be of age. She did not look a day over seventeen. But she had been a very shrewd assistant to Professor Addison, the seer of second sight; or else that remarkable man had a strong hold upon Ina.

She might be influenced entirely by Addison's stronger nature; but when Chick had seen her alone and accomplished her arrest, he had felt some pity for the beautiful creature who seemed to have wrecked her life so uselessly.

That she should deliberately plan, while yet in jail, to take part in further misdeeds which would bring her into the grasp of the law again, seemed astonishing. Yet it is a strange fact, and Chick knew it to be true, that to the mind so warped by heritage or evil association the danger and excitement of such a life are very alluring.

Under hypnotic influence or not, Ina Corrette had proved herself a mighty shrewd and nervy crook. If Addison *was* alive, and she had joined him immediately on getting away from the "prison angel," Chick believed that there was likely to be a sensation in police circles before long.

The words written on the strip of paper which Ina had used in her toilet suggested to Nick Carter's astute assistants the possibility of some trick being taken by Ina and her friends at West Farms. As soon as the car could be brought around from the garage, Chick and Patsy got aboard and they sped out the East Side, crossed the Third Avenue bridge and kept merrily on, out the Old Boston Road until they made the turn to the West Farms square.

Danny was "let in" by Patsy to the business in hand, and all three were on the qui vive when the car whirled down the slope into the dull little settlement.

It was still raining and there were not a dozen people in sight about the criss-crossed car-tracks. But on a prominent corner stood a water-proofed policeman. Patsy recognized him as an old friend from the Bowery—a bull sent for some peccadillo to "play with the goats."

"Hoo, McCarthy!" shouted Patsy, as the car came to a stop beside the morose-looking cop.

"Hullo! be the powers! is it *you*, Mr. Garvan?"

"'Tis never anybody else. What's doing out here, McCarthy?"

"'Sam Johnson's white-washed his hencoop,' 'Bill Perkins has built an ell on his barn; by heck!' and 'Abe Smith was in town on Satterdy—come ag'in, Abe!'" replied the unhappy policeman. "It's as lively as old Chatham Square when the Tooney Pleasure Association has gone up the river on a chowder. What brings ye to this Heaven-forsaken hole, Mr. Garvan?"

"Curiosity," admitted Patsy, having got the tip from Chick to do the talking.

"'Tis a strange harkering ye must have ter see a desarted village—and that's no lie!"

"Not exactly the place—that doesn't arouse our interest," said young Garvan, smiling. "But we're anxious to know if anything's happened here today——"

"Ain't I been giving you the most recent extracts from the West Farms *Daily Bazoo?*" demanded the officer, in disgust. "Happen? Nawthin' ever happens here!"

"Hullo!" said Chick, suddenly and softly. "What's this building here? A bank?"

"That's a bank, sir," said McCarthy quickly, looking up at the ugly front of the cement-block building.

"And I can see the front of the partition between the public room and the clerks' apartment from where I sit here in the car," said Chick slowly. "I can see in over the curtain that is drawn half-way up that broad window."

"Well?" ejaculated Patsy, turning to look at him in surprise.

"Why—what puzzles me," said Chick slowly, "is the fact that although I can see the edge of the counter, and the frame of wood at the top of the half-partition, I see no screen there."

"Heh? What's that?" queried McCarthy, looking puzzled.

"You don't see any screen?" repeated Patsy.

"There is usually a wire screen erected to defend the inner compartment of a bank from the public—isn't there?"

"Begorra! w'at's all this comin'?" ejaculated the policeman suddenly.

A big red automobile, filled with uniformed cops, was bearing down the hill like the wind. It was scarcely brought to a stop behind the machine of Nick Carter's assistants, when the policemen disembarked and rushed up the steps of the bank. The lieutenant in charge stopped for an instant to demand of the amazed McCarthy:

"Do you know about this?"

"About what, sir?"

"The bank. It's been robbed. The whole force are locked up in the vault. Where have you been this afternoon?"

"Right here, or hereabout!" declared McCarthy, blinking at the lieutenant as though somebody had struck him in the face and he couldn't return it.

"Yes—you—have!" drawled his superior officer.

"So help me, I have!" repeated McCarthy.

"And you haven't seen anything wrong here?"

"Divil a thing."

"Nor heard anything?"

"No, sir."

"*You* certainly did not telephone headquarters, then?"

"I did not."

Chick and Patsy had both alighted now and ran into the bank, too. The lieutenant came quickly after them.

"You gents better stay out of here," he began.

But Chick told him who they were, and, with a snort, the lieutenant said nothing further to them.

The banking floor was built so high above the street that it was not easy for anybody passing to see clearly into the place, without climbing the steps. Therefore, the disarrangement of the place had escaped attention.

But a glance showed what had occurred. The screen torn away, the broken shelf behind the counter, the scattered coin and bills on the floor, told their own story.

And the crowd of police officers stood staring at the closed door of the great vault!

"Glory be!" gasped one. "Can it be they're in there?"

"It's smothered they'll be in short order," said another.

"They may be dead now!" was the cry of a third.

Suddenly Chick's voice quelled the talk.

"Listen!" he cried.

In the silence that ensued a tapping on the inner skin of the vault was plainly audible. The noise of their entrance must have been noted by those shut in the vault, and they were signaling to let their would-be rescuers know that they were still alive!

The situation was a desperate one, however.

"How many men are there in that box?" demanded Chick, first of all, wheeling on the lieutenant of police.

"Six."

"Six? Great heavens!"

"That's what was said over the wire. They got it first at headquarters, of course, and passed it on. Of course the commish. will send a bunch of plain-clothes Johnnies out from Mulberry Street; but Captain Boler determined to get us here first. And now, I'm blamed if I know what to do. Where'll we get the combination for the safe?"

"Combination!" repeated Patsy, with a snort. "That would do you a whole lot of good—I don't think!"

"Why not?"

"It's a time-lock—don't you see? It's been shut," he rattled the knob, "and it isn't likely to open till to-morrow morning—unless you know where to get a drill and a good charge of dynamite."

"Thunder!" gasped the lieutenant.

"And that would likely kill those inside—if they didn't smother in the meantime," said Chick. "The concussion would be terrible. That vault must be opened in some other way."

"Say! who do you suppose telephoned headquarters?" cried Patsy.

"Give it up," said the lieutenant.

"But surely nobody around here knew about the affair. There would be a crowd here."

"And there's no telephone inside that vault," said Chick grimly.

"The only party who would have known about it was the one who shut them into the vault."

"The burglars!" cried Patsy.

"The place has certainly been robbed," said Chick, in a low voice to his comrade. "And whoever took the cash shut up the six men—that is sure."

"It's just as likely that they informed the police, not wanting the murder of six men on their consciences," remarked Patsy Garvan.

"You are probably right there, Patsy. Have you looked at that screen?" asked Chick suddenly.

"No," said young Garvan, somewhat startled.

"Do so. You will find that most of the screws—rather *bolts*—that held it to the wooden partition were sawn through. This was no off-hand job. Somebody was in here by night and made ready for the attack which seems to have been so successful. A sharp hand is shown here, Patsy."

"Gee! Do you suppose little Ina——"

"*And* her friends, perhaps. It would seem as though several persons must have been mixed up in this. Think of six men in broad daylight being held up in this bank and shut into the vault—ah!"

The tapping had begun again inside the vault. The policemen stood about in helpless attitudes. The lieutenant had sent one man to find a blacksmith and tools. He might as well have sent for a seamstress and her bodkin! That vault door was made to withstand both fire and hardened steel.

"What can we do, Chick?" murmured Patsy, troubled indeed.

"This may be our work. I wish to goodness Nick were here!" whispered Chickering Carter.

"Those men will surely smother, Chick!"

"By gravy! I can't stand for that," cried the young man, and he suddenly approached the vault door again. "Somehow—by *some* method—they must be released!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE SIGNAL.

Chick Carter would never have been Nick's right-hand man had he not imbibed many of the great detective's habits of thought—even of expression. Nick Carter's personality was impressed upon each of his assistants in the measure of his confidence in them, and their length of association with him.

Nick's ingenuity of mind has often been proven marvelous. But Chick was a close second to him in "seeing into a millstone."

The situation seemed blocked—fatally blocked.

Six men were in that vault, according to police report, the vault door was fitted with a time-lock, set

for opening on the following day, and they knew nobody to whom to send for help in opening the cumbersome door at once.

The Grangers' State Bank was not a large institution. Aside from President Ombry, Cashier Perriton, and bookkeeper Olds, there was only the vice-president and teller, Macomber Price, who would be likely to know all about the time-lock.

The teller was not here. Nobody knew where he lived. And when that was discovered, it was learned that Mr. Macomber Price was traveling in the West for his health.

"I've done all that can be done," grunted the police lieutenant. "When that feller gets here with his sledge——"

"He'll have a sweet time opening that door with a sledge-hammer," remarked Chick. "Why don't you send for a battering-ram—or a cannon, over to the armory."

"I suppose, being a tin-badger, that you think you're some smart," snarled the police officer. "Let's see you do something."

"I will—when I've thought it out," remarked Chick coolly.

Then he turned quickly to Patsy, and whispered:

"There's no use in two of us hanging around here, my boy. Have you anything to suggest regarding this vault door?"

"Not a blessed thing, Chick," said the worried Patsy.

"All right. Leave it to me, then. And meanwhile, you can make some inquiries that will be mighty pertinent to this game—or I miss my guess; In the first place, sound McCarthy, your friend on the outside."

"Why, he doesn't know a living thing about the break!" cried Patsy.

"Maybe he doesn't think he does. But go through him thoroughly. Use a fine-tooth comb on his wits. You may stir up something."

"I'll do it!"

"And Patsy!"

"Well?"

"We must find out who telephoned the police, and where they were when they telephoned. See?"

"Bet your life!" declared Patsy, departing from the bank.

These matters off his mind, Chick turned his full attention to the vault. He had heard, from time to time, the faintly tapped signal of the men inside. Now he picked up a steel ruler from one of the desks and, when the tapping within ceased for a moment, he tapped back.

There was an interchange of these signals for a few moments, while the police lieutenant looked on with a supercilious smile.

"What you doin'?" he asked finally. "Trying a grape-vine telegraph game? Sendin' them Christmas wishes—happy New Years' greetings? Aw, you fly cops make me sick!"

"You'd better take something for that sickness," murmured Chick sweetly. "Just keep still, will you?"

The truth was that Chick had been trying to communicate with those inside the vault by the use of the Morse alphabet. If either of the six men confined there were telegraph-operators, he might gain some knowledge which, at the present moment, was of vast importance to Chick.

He had set out to release the unfortunate men before they would become totally exhausted. How long the small quantity of air in the vault would last them he did not know.

Of one thing Chick was pretty sure. They had been locked in for quite half an hour. The vault could not be very large. They must already be in a very painful situation for lack of fresh oxygen.

The tapping he had made spelled out a question—an important question, indeed.

Chick had noted the make of the vault door. He knew that to-day even time-locks are so arranged that, with the "master-word," one may open them without waiting for the clockwork mechanism to come into play.

The time-lock makes it unnecessary for more than one or two persons to know the secret combination of the lock. Perhaps, in this small bank, only the president himself knew this combination.

Chick was not sure, at this hour, that the president was inside the vault. But if there were six men there, one of them might know the combination.

His question, rattled out in the Morse alphabet, had asked for this combination. But there was nothing tangible in the signaling from the inside of the vault. Evidently—and unfortunately—none of the men confined there knew how to telegraph.

Yet there was a remarkable thing about the rapping on the inside. Chick began to realize this surprising thing after a few moments.

Although the replies to his questioning knocks made no "sense" in Morse, the raps were always the same!

This point suddenly smote Chick, and with startling force. Every time the man signaled on the inside of the big iron box, the raps were given in the same way—they were exactly of the same number!

"Hush, you fellows!" commanded Chick, making a warning gesture to some of the useless cops, who were talking.

"Give him more room—he wants air!" sneered the lieutenant. "He's goin' to perform some hoky-poky on it, an' say, 'Open sesame! Eeny, meeny, miny, mo!' Didn't youse fellers ever see Keller at work?"

Chick rose up suddenly, and he was *mad*.

"You big fool!" he exclaimed. "If you didn't have your uniform on, I'd hand you something that would keep you busy nursing for a week! You ought to be ashamed of yourself. These men in the vault are on the point of death. You are helpless yourself, and you would keep anybody else from aiding them!"

"You're a liar!" growled the lieutenant, but he looked shamefaced.

"I'll attend to your case later," gritted Chick, his eyes flashing. "But you'll keep still now!"

So threatening was his look that the man subsided. Chick knelt beside the safe again, and put his ear to it. The signal was repeated.

CHAPTER V.

"AFTER THEM!"

One—two—three—four. Then a space. One—two. Then another wait. One—two—three—four—five—six. Then in a moment: One—two—three.

"It's surely a number—or a series of numbers," whispered Chick to himself.

He listened once more. After a space, the feeble raps came again. And they *were* growing more feeble. The hand that inspired the sounds was becoming weaker.

4—2—6—3.

Chick could not mistake the sounds. He seized the ruler and repeated them, in the same slow monotone, when the one inside had finished.

Quickly—almost eagerly, it would seem!—the signal was repeated. The man inside had realized that there was one of his rescuers who understood that his repeated signal meant something—that it was of importance!

And what did it mean?

To the stupid lieutenant and the thick-headed officers standing about, the sounds meant nothing. Their minds were not acute enough to see the value of the peculiar signal. Their hearts might have been all right, but their heads were rather useless in this emergency.

Chick glanced at the dial around the vault door-knob, and believed instantly that he knew the significance of the numbers rapped by somebody inside the locked vault.

Indeed, it could mean nothing else, it seemed. A man would not idly telegraph the same number of raps in this way without there being a deep and important meaning behind it!

Chick seized the dial-knob and looked intently at the figures. By setting the pointer at certain figures, first one and then another in combination, and then turning the big knob, the tumblers of the lock could be made to fall and the bolts released. That was plain enough, to be sure!

And with careful hand Chick put the thing to the test. He gave the indicator a preliminary twirl.

"See him!" growled the lieutenant. "He's goin' ter open it at once, I tell you."

Chick paid no attention to him just then. He had begun to manipulate the indicator—first to the figure 4, carefully, very carefully. Then he turned it back to 2—again taking every precaution that it should not move a hair's breadth beyond the figure.

On again to 6 stole the pointer—to a hair's breadth; then back to the figure 5.

With his ear beside the lock Chick listened. He almost held his breath. He turned the knob slowly, slowly——

There was no click from inside the vault!

A dead silence followed, as the pointer moved past the last figure and Chick tugged at the knob of the door. He knew this last was useless. The combination of the lock had not worked!

"Wonderful, wonderful!" murmured the lieutenant.

Chick was pretty angry, but he would not give the big brute the satisfaction of showing him any further attention—not just then!

He retained his grip on the indicator-knob and began all over again, after another preliminary twirl.

4—2—6—3. The figures came out exactly as before. He paid every care to getting the pointer exactly right each time.

And the result? As Patsy would have said, "Nothing doing!"

"If ye don't at first succeed, suck eggs!" chortled the lieutenant of police.

Some of his men looked at him in open disgust. Here were six men in danger of their lives a few feet away, and he could talk and act in this manner! But they dared not speak for their own souls' sake!

And just then the policeman who had been sent for help burst into the bank. A swarthy man in a leather apron and smoke-grimmed face and arms followed him. He carried several heavy tools which were, Chick knew at a glance, about as much use in opening a modern safe door as an old woman's knitting-needles.

"Here's the smith!" exclaimed the messenger-cop.

"Now we'll do something!" cried the lieutenant. "Come! get out of the way, Mister Man! You've played with the whirlamajig long enough."

Chick straightened up and looked at him.

"You are not going to be foolish enough to ask this man to attack a vault door like that with a sledge and crowbar, are you?" demanded Nick Carter's assistant, with scorn.

"That's what I'm going to do, you bet!" declared the lieutenant.

"He can't open it that way."

"And you can't open it *your* way, sonny!" cried the lieutenant.

"But, at least, I am doing the mechanism no injury. If you break off those knobs, how can anybody open the vault excepting with a charge of giant powder?"

"Say! those men are smothering in there——"

At that moment the rapping began again inside. All listened. Chick counted the raps once more, and verified his former counting. They were surely 4, 2, 6, 3!

"Gee! they're most done for in there!" murmured one of the policemen.

"And you want to get to work, blacksmith!" commanded the lieutenant.

"Do you mean to tell me that the bank people are shut into their own safe?" asked the smith.

"That's what!"

"Not Mr. Perriton—and Mr. Olds—and Mr. Om-

bry? Why, Mr. President Ombry's daughter was at my shop only this morning, having her pony's shoe tightened. Poor man——"

"Aw, cut it out!" cried the lieutenant. "Get a move on you! They will be smothered to death while you are gassin'!"

"Be careful what you do, smith!" interrupted Chick. "If you injure the mechanism of that vault door, you know very well that it can never be opened until it is drilled into. It may take days to do it. Don't take the last chance for life those poor fellows have!"

"Shut up! What do *you* know about it?" demanded the lieutenant roughly.

"I know that somebody inside the vault is rapping out the same series of figures each time—4, 2, 6, 3. I believe it is the combination of the safe——"

"Aw, cheese it! What did you make out of it? Did you open the door with them numbers I seen you trying," scoffed the lieutenant.

"So far the combination certainly has not worked. But it may yet," admitted Chick.

"Aw, say! mebbe he was rapping out his laundry number. Wants you to get his shirt at the Chink's across the square," cried the lieutenant of police coarsely. "You're a shine! Fade away. Smith, take up that sledge and hammer the daylight out of that door! That's the only way to get 'em out!"

"I am afraid the gentleman is right, lieutenant," said the blacksmith. "I shall ruin the lock."

"Hang you!" cried the official policeman. "Give *me* the sledge. I'll hit it a crack! As though those poor devils inside would be thinking of rapping numbers! And, if they do, the numbers might mean anything but the safe-combination."

He grabbed at the sledge-hammer, evidently intending to put his declaration in effect. Chick suddenly started away from the safe.

"Hold him, men! Don't let him get that hammer, blacksmith! Wait! Wait a moment, men!"

"What—what's the matter with you now, you blooming idiot!" roared the lieutenant, angered additionally because the brawny smith would not give up his tools.

"Wait!" called Chick again, wildly seizing the telephone-book and rapidly thumbing the leaves.

Then he bethought him of a quicker way to the end he had in view. The telephone-booth was before him. He darted in, turned on the incandescent lamp, and glanced at the card above the transmitter.

There were written in a clerkly hand the names of the officers of the bank and their telephone-numbers and street addresses.

"It's here! I've got it!" shouted the excited Chick, to the crowd of wondering policemen.

"He's got another fit!" growled the lieutenant. "Give me that sledge, *you!* I'll batter the face off this door in no time."

"Wait!" commanded Chick again. "I hold you responsible if the door is touched, blacksmith!"

Then he shouted into the transmitter, having put the receiver to his ear:

"Hello, Central! Give me President Ombry's number—his residence—four—two—six—three *Jerome!*"

He waited a moment in eagerness. The others waited, too, knowing that Chick had made a tenstrike this time!

"All right," said Central. "Here's your number."

"Four—two—six—three, Jerome—Mr. Ombry's?" inquired Chick, restraining his voice to a conversational tone.

"This is it; but Mr. Ombry is not at home yet."

"I know that—that is, I am speaking from the bank. We are in some difficulty here. The vault has been locked and it must be opened again at once. Does any member of Mr. Ombry's family know the combination that releases the time-lock?"

"Why—I do!" cried the unmistakably feminine voice at the other end of the wire.

"Who is speaking, please?" asked Chick.

"I am his daughter."

"Will you come down here at once and help us?"

"Why—I—I don't know, sir. Who are you?" asked Miss Ombry, in much doubt. "Is my father there?"

"He is," said Chick.

"Then why does he not open it himself? Oh, has something happened to papa?"

"Something serious has happened, Miss Ombry," declared Chick earnestly. "But I assure you that your presence here will quickly end the peril——"

"Papa is in danger!" she cried, and Chick heard her drop the phone-receiver, leaving the wire open, and run from the room.

"Good! She's coming!" he cried, turning from the instrument to the crowd outside the open door of the booth.

"Who's coming?" demanded the lieutenant of police.

"Mr. Ombry's daughter."

"Who the deuce is Ombry?"

"President of the bank," said Chick quietly.

"And what good will his daughter do?"

"She will open the safe. She knows the combination. What he tapped us from inside was his telephone-number, *not* the vault combination. *That* was probably too complicated to be rapped out on the iron. Possess your soul with patience, lieutenant. That door will be opened without your smashing it with a sledge."

"And meanwhile the poor devils will smother," grumbled the obstinate fellow.

But they didn't. There were still faint tappings from within the iron box when the door burst open and a very pretty girl of some twenty years came in, her hair tousled and wild eyes. She had ridden all the way at breakneck speed on her pony.

"What is it? Where is father?" she cried, looking about at the mob of policemen.

Then she saw Chick, the only one in civilian dress

beside the smith, and she repeated the queries, addressing herself to him:

"Where is my father?"

"We suppose him to be in the vault—locked in with the other members of the bank force, Miss Ombry," said Chick quickly.

"Oh! What——"

"There has been a robbery here. Or, so we suppose. The thieves got the bank force in the vault and locked the door. It is a time-lock, as you know——"

"But it can be opened!" cried the girl. "Father bound me to secrecy when he told me. I was to use it only in an emergency——"

"And this is an emergency, sure enough," declared Chick.

"But how do I know——"

"Listen!" cried Chick. "Do you hear that rapping on the inside of the safe? It is growing weaker—fainter! I believe it is your father rapping out your telephone-number, so that we would call you here. But they must be in sore need of fresh air now. They have been in that safe more than an hour, Miss Ombry!"

At that she hesitated no longer, but flung herself at the face of the vault. With nervous fingers she twirled the indicator-knob—so rapidly that none of them could easily have followed her movements with their eyes.

There was the ring of the tumblers, the click of bolts, and she seized the knob of the door and put all her strength to the opening of the heavier barrier. But it was Chick who swung it open.

There was the two-leaved door within, but it was not locked. Chick flung it open and caught in his arms the man who leaned against it. It was President Ombry himself, almost fainting, and his five companions were in quite as serious a condition.

But they could gasp out the details of the hold-up and tell what had been done to them.

"Only two men did all this?" cried the lieutenant of police. "Well, you're a healthy lot of fellers, I don't think!"

Chick got Niles McCormack, the messenger and janitor, aside, and from him obtained further details. The two robbers were both shrouded in dust-coats, wore caps and goggles. They came in an auto, and he was quite sure that there was no other person in the machine when it stopped before the door. Yes, it was left with the engine running. He remembered hearing it while the thieves held them up inside the bank.

What thing had amazed him the most? Why, the fact that the big robber had yanked off that screen so easily. McCormack could not understand it. He had always considered that it was a very strongly fastened screen.

"It was—until somebody got through most of the screws with a watch-spring saw," muttered Chick. "Well, what about the two men? One was big, the other small. Are you sure they were men, McCormack?"

"For pity's sake! What would they be else?" demanded the other.

"One might have been a woman."

"Certainly not the boss. His voice was a man's."

"And the voice of the other? The one who held the guns to Ombry and Olds?"

"Why—to tell the truth, I did not hear *his* voice."

"Did he speak?"

"I don't think he did."

"Ah!" ejaculated Chick.

At that moment Patsy entered the bank and beckoned Chick to one side.

"I see you've got 'em out of durance, old man?" he said.

"By dumb luck—yes."

"And I've struck a clue by dumb luck, too," said Patsy.

"What's that?"

"McCarthy didn't know a thing. He didn't even see an automobile here at the bank. But they came in an automobile, all right, all right!"

"Who was telling you?"

"The car-starter over yonder. He saw 'em. He saw the car come to the bank. Two men went in. One carried a bag. They were gone fifteen minutes—think of it, Chick! Fifteen minutes in that bank, and nobody got onto their game!

"Then they came out, the big fellow with *two* bags, the little one with one. They pitched 'em into the tonneau, and then the little fellow got under the wheel and the big man sat back. They whizzed away——"

"In which direction?"

"South on the boulevard, going toward town."

"That's enough," said Chick firmly. "We've heard enough. Here comes some more of these uniformed stiffs. I don't want to meet any more of 'em.

"Come on, Patsy, we'll get out at once."

"Where to?" demanded Patsy.

"After them!" cried Chick. "And we've got to work quick—understand?"

CHAPTER VI.

THE ONE WHO TELEPHONED.

"Say, what are we chasing?" demanded Patsy suddenly.

"What do you suppose—our shadows?" responded Chick, with a smile.

"But we started out to try and head off that girl and her partner——"

"And we didn't do it," finished Chick.

"Well——"

"Great Scott, Patsy! don't you see the significance of this robbery yet?"

"I do if I'm allowed to take a good many things for granted," returned the other, shaking his head.

"What things, for instance?"

"There were only two people in the machine the car-starter saw at the bank. He said both were men."

"That's what the bank folk say, too," chuckled Chickering Carter.

"Well?"

"I'm convinced that it was the girl, all right."

"The little feller?"

"That's right. She was covered up with a long dust-coat and wore a short skirt and high lace boots, perhaps. With her cap and mask, that would be sufficient to make her look like a man."

"I suppose that is so," murmured Patsy. "But it's only a chance."

"That's right. I consider it a *good* chance, nevertheless," declared Chick. "We went hunting for something, didn't we?"

"You bet!"

"Well, say—didn't we get it?"

"But it seems almost unreasonable that we should have struck her trail so easy," grunted Patsy.

"Shucks! Don't quarrel with the goods the gods send you," advised Chick. "I am ready to expect anything from Ina Corrette and—her partner."

"Meaning Addison—Crummles?"

"That's it."

"He's sure alive, then?"

"Well, if this was him who ran the bank hold-up, he's exceedingly lively for a dead one!" and Chick chuckled again.

"I don't know what Nick will say to us, going off in this way."

"Don't you fret about Nick. I'm convinced," declared Chick, "that he has serious doubts of Addison ever having been killed in that up-town fire.

"Hullo! Hold up, Danny!"

"All right, sir," said the chauffeur, slowing down immediately.

"Stop here."

"Yes, sir."

The car came to a shaking halt before an old roadhouse, the big porch of which was enclosed by glass, making a "sun-parlor" of attractive appearance.

"What's up?" queried Patsy.

"See that sign, my boy?" demanded Chick, pointing to a blue-and-white tin sign extending from a bracket over one of the doors of the porch.

"Going to telephone?"

"I'm going to find out who telephoned recently *here*," said Chick. "This is the first public telephone-sign I've noticed since we left the bank. If that car came this way, it was undoubtedly somewhere along here that the message was sent to police headquarters."

"Holy mackerel!" ejaculated Patsy. "Would they have dared to stop so near the place?"

"Well, they didn't travel far before telephoning. The time elapsed proves *that*," and Chick went briskly up the steps and entered the hotel.

He was met by a waiter and the usual smile, that meant: "Here is a chance to make a tip." And this was not a good day for tips, so the waiter was more than usually obsequious.

Chick "made good" in the first place, knowing very well that nothing like "salve" for an itching palm will tickle the wits of a serving-man. He dropped the ready half-dollar into the waiter's hand.

"You have a telephone here?"

"Certainly, sir. This way, sir."

"Hold hard!" said Chick. "Another question. Who has been using it this afternoon?"

"Why—I—I don't know that I can tell you, sir."

"Let me possibly refresh your memory," Chick remarked, with his hand on the man's shoulder. "Not many customers this rainy afternoon, eh?"

"That's right, sir. Not many. It's quite a dead house on a rainy day."

"So I presumed. But you have had an auto stop here before mine?"

"Since luncheon, sir?"

"That's it. Since luncheon. In fact, not over an hour and a quarter ago. A car going toward the city. A red car. Only two people in it. Perhaps a big man and a little fellow under the wheel."

"No, sir. I haven't seen any party like that," declared the waiter, shaking his head.

"Sure?"

"Positive!"

"*Who* have you seen, then?"

"There was a car stopped for a moment. I didn't notice the color of it, sir."

"And who was in it?" asked Chick.

"Only one man—and a lady."

"Ah!"

"The man was driving."

"Indeed? A little man?"

"No, sir. Rather a tall man. I couldn't tell you much what he looked like. He was capped and had big goggles on, you see."

"And the lady?"

"Was young, I should say—— Why, *she* phoned! Now I remember, it seemed to be over her phoning that they had the scrap."

"Indeed? They quarreled, did they?"

"Well, the man was rather nasty about it, sir. She came in first. The boss was here, and he showed her the phone-booth. The man came in after her, and I asked him what he'd have. He was ugly, and cursed me, and said to the girl, 'You are mad to do it!'—just like that."

"But she did it?" asked Chick, with a smile.

"Well, she went to the telephone. It's a slot-machine, and we knew nothing about who she called up, of course. Then she came back, all in a hurry, and he swore again and seized her by the arm.

"'We've fooled away enough time,' I heard him say, as they went out. I had another customer just then, and I didn't watch 'em go off in their car. I heard it puffing away out there, just the same. And I wonder—— Say, sir, was there something wrong with that couple? Maybe you are after them?"

"Maybe," returned Chick quietly.

"Well, I might be able to tip you off to something," said the waiter doubtfully.

"That so?"

"Perhaps you'll laugh at me. But I believe that other customer of mine—— Well, it was funny the way he went off."

"What do you mean?" asked Chick, mystified by the waiter's air and words.

"Why, he was an odd-looking man—seemed like a foreigner. And he acted funny. He came in while the big man was waiting for the girl. He pushed by the man, I noticed, and stared at him as though he'd seen him before. The automobile feller never noticed, though.

"As I say, I went for this foreign-looking chap's order just as the girl came out of the booth and went off with her friend. When I came back with the beer, the foreigner was gone, but he'd left a quarter lying on his table to pay for the drink he'd ordered.

"*That* interested me. I ran to the door. I didn't see anything of the automobile. I wasn't thinking much of that couple then. It was the other fellow I was interested in.

"And he was just taking the trolley-car toward town. It stops here in front of the hotel, you see. He jumped on the front platform, said something to the motorman, and when the car started it went a-flying! I believe the motorman put on extra speed. He was running over the limit when it went out of sight."

"Following the motor-car?" asked Chick slowly.

"Why, I didn't see the automobile at all. He might have, though."

"Thanks," said Chick, placing the mate of the first coin in the waiter's hand. "Now I'll use your phone myself."

He went into the booth and called up the superintendent's office of that division of the telephone company. Explaining who he was, and the circumstances of the bank's robbery, and the events which had followed, he easily learned that the number called that afternoon from the roadhouse had really been police headquarters. Such a call was not likely to be overlooked at Central.

"Good!" muttered Chick, as he strode forth. "I've established the fact that two people stopped here in a car—a man and a girl. The girl telephoned police headquarters. There can be no doubt but that *she* was the one who told the department that the bank force was locked in the vault back there.

"Now! Reasoning from those premises, it is not hard to believe that the small man who kept the bank officials helpless under the pistol-points was our pretty friend, Ina Corrette.

"Once in the car, and out of sight of the bank, she threw aside her cap and mask, and put on a hat and veil that she had ready for the emergency. It was probable that she changed places with Addison—if he's her partner—at the same time, too.

"By Jove! She's a woman, after all. That villain, for the sake of making a successful get-away, would have left those six men to smother in the vault. Ina couldn't stand for that.

"She is not entirely under this man's control, then. Or else, like most women, she knows how to twist him around her finger on occasion. She saved the lives of those six men, at least. He had to stand for her giving the alarm. It will make him the more careful as to their future movements, for he'll know very well that some smart Alec of a cop will get to this roadhouse in time and hear all about their visit here.

"If they'd telephoned before Ina shifted into the hat and veil, they would have been wiser. Probably she was so excited at first that she did not realize just what had been done to the six bank men. Having time to think, after the first get-away, it struck her hard. She's all right, at that! If she is still associated with Addison—if he is the man in the case—he already has on his conscience *one* murder, perhaps two! It is believed that he poisoned Professor Morray.

"He ought to be glad that Ina has saved him from a wholesale crime like this which almost occurred at the bank. Humph! We'll go on; but, by Jove! where will we go to hunt for them? The trail is cold now," said Chick, coming slowly out of the hotel.

And then suddenly he stood stock-still and smote his hands together.

"Great heavens!" he murmured. "There's another point that almost escaped me. *Who's the man who is dogging them?*

"Was the foreign-looking chap that the waiter tried to serve after Addison and the girl? Humph! Was the waiter right in his statement that the stranger boarded that car and seemed to be in chase of the automobile?

"Oh, fudge! Here's where mystery is piled on mystery! Or was the waiter a fabricator—was he gassing? Perhaps he might have been looking for that second tip.

"Still—I think he was honest. I believe he was. But, honest or not, who was the stranger following Addison and Ina? That's a point which looms big on the horizon!"

CHAPTER VIII.

A SECOND STROKE.

It was nine o'clock in the evening, and Chick, Patsy, and Danny had made a late supper, with Joseph hovering about the dining-room of Nick Carter's house, as Patsy said, "like a banshee at the wedding-feast."

"Though 'tis little I feel like a wedding," grumbled the young Irishman, thinking of his wife Adelina, now absent from the city.

"You're a healthy-looking bridegroom!" chaffed Chick.

"I feel a deal more like chief mourner at a funeral —and, by the same token, you fellows ought to feel the same. We're a set of stiffs. We're a trio of numbskulls! What'll Nick say to us when he hears of how we've been too late to the fair, and just missed nabbing the girl and her side-partner—and they pulling off as bold a robbery as has been done in this neighborhood for a blue moon?"

The trio of assistants had finally come back to the house after a long and fruitless chase in and out of the Bronx and Harlem highways and byways.

They went to many hotels, stopped various policemen, afoot and mounted, and spoke with a number of other citizens. But after leaving the roadhouse where Ina Corrette had telephoned to the police about the six men in the bank-vault, not an atom of a clue did Nick Carter's three assistants pick up.

Chick had told Patsy and Danny of his discoveries in the hotel. They had threshed over the possibilities as to whom the foreign-looking chap might be, mentioned by the waiter as seemingly interested in the girl's companion—and made nothing out of it.

Finally they had come home discouraged, and the deferred meal, which Joseph saw was good and well served, even though they were late, had not put much heart into them.

Chick had halted at the *Herald* office and communicated with Nick in the way which had been arranged between them when the detective went away. His personal on this occasion read:

"Dear Jim: Bet you a dime, even money. Charlie."

There had been several rendezvous agreed upon by Nick Carter and his first assistant when he "departed this life." This remarkable personal referred to the Union Dime Savings Institution, at the junction of Broadway, Sixth Avenue, and Thirty-second Street, as a place of meeting, and it was easy to translate "even money" into "even hours." Chick proposed that he, or one of his mates, should be passing that particular corner every other hour, beginning at eight the next morning, until Nick saw the notification and showed up. Otherwise, they were forbidden to communicate with their chief.

The door-bell suddenly rang as the trio of disheartened followers of Nick Carter rose from their meal. Joseph went out softly, but quickly returned and spoke to Chick, beckoning him out of the room.

"There is a young man here from Belfer & Knapp —very much excited. He wants to see you, Mr. Chickering."

"*Me?* Are you sure?"

"He asked for Mr. Carter. You are the only person of that name here now," said Joseph solemnly, who took Nick's absence from home very hard, indeed.

"What does he want?"

"I do not know, but——"

"Well, what is it, old man?"

Chick and Patsy both took a familiar tone at times with Nick Carter's old valet; but Joseph never allowed himself to take a familiar tone with anybody. Had Joseph been blessed with a son, and had that son needed physical correction, Joseph would have respectfully begged the honor of his society for a strenuous few moments in the woodshed!

"Belfer & Knapp are the big diamond merchants on the avenue, sir."

"So they are!" exclaimed Chick suddenly.

"If I might suggest such a thing, it may be that this young man has been sent here to see you in a professional capacity."

"Right you are, Joseph! I remember that Belfer & Knapp used to be on Nick Carter's list. We have done work for them before. I'll go right in and see the young man. In the reception-room, you say?"

"Yes, sir," said Joseph.

Ten minutes later Chick bounded up the stairs, and found Patsy mooning over a newspaper in Nick Carter's office.

"Come along! There's something doing," said Chick briefly.

"What's the matter now? Anything more about that bank business?"

"We haven't been called into that bank case," snapped Chick. "Have we?"

"Well, we're some interested," grinned Patsy.

"That's for Nick to say—when I see him to-morrow. But to-night there is something else."

"Do you mind telling me what that is?" drawled Patsy, preparing to go with him.

"Diamond-lifting case. Slick, too. Right around here on Fifth Avenue."

"Whew!"

"Whole tray of stones swiped. All gone in a minute, it would seem. Tray was right in the front window—or, rather, in *one* of the firm's front windows. Place full of clerks and customers. Not a suspicious person around. A private detective on the premises all the time. And forty thousand dollars' worth of stones, without counting the settings, gone like that!" and Chick snapped his fingers.

"Whew! Say! and they just found it out?"

"They did not close to-night till eight o'clock. The diamonds were missed when the trays were taken out of the window to be put in the safe. It might have been done any time within the last two hours, so they think. Come on! We'll find out something about it."

The two young men started to leave the house. As they descended the steps a closed carriage, drawn by a prancing pair of horses, blanketed and with silver monograms on the said blankets, and on their blinders and rosettes—in fact, a very fancy-looking turnout—dashed up to the door, just east of Nick Carter's own house.

"Hullo! Isn't that something new?" demanded Chick.

"Nope," returned Patsy, smiling. "The old lady is putting on dog just now. Danny has it straight from

the pretty housemaid you've seen him chinning over the fence to, that she's expecting her nephew for a visit, and he's a swell from London——. Oh, luddy me!" finished Patsy, under his breath. "This must be *It!*"

The private carriage door had opened. There was no footman in attendance, but a young man—little more than a youth, leaped out. He was dressed in the latest thing in a long, loose, check traveling-ulster, he wore a cap that *must* have been bought in Piccadilly, and he carried a small dressing-bag of so vivid a yellow that, even in the half-darkness of the evening, seemed to illuminate the whole block!

This young gentleman turned and extended his hand to whoever was in the carriage. Out floundered a heavyweight female, much beribboned as to bonnet, with a flashy opera-cloak and several other bizarre articles of clothing in sight that did not harmonize correctly with the tone of the neighborhood, which was eminently respectable, if not a little aristocratic.

That the old lady was a fright could not be denied. She had been a source of quiet amusement to the neighborhood for some time—ever since the old tenants of the house next to Nick Carter's had moved out some three or four months before.

Aside from the fact that she was wealthy and eccentric, the neighbors knew little about Mrs. Matilda Freyhuysen. But she was a subject for much banter on the part of Patsy, who found something to ridicule—good-naturedly—in most people in this world.

"Gee, Chick! you're as solemn as a screech-owl," remarked the young Irishman, as they hurried off together.

The fact that there was "something doing" had acted like a tonic on Patsy's spirits.

"You scarcely looked at the old girl—and at that freak she's brought home from the steamship with her. Danny said she was going down to the dock to meet the nephew herself."

"Is that so?" murmured Chick, his mind evidently elsewhere.

"Wake up! What's the matter with you?" exclaimed Patsy. "Trying to work up a theory about this diamond robbery before you look over the whole affair? That's against the rules, you know!"

"No, I wasn't thinking of that," declared Chick.

"And you certainly wasn't interested in the old girl and her nevvy?"

"Not exactly. But then—it *was* connected with them," observed Chick seriously.

"Heh?"

"I was wondering who the fellow was—a full-grown man, I believe—who was riding behind on the Freyhuysen carriage when it came to the door there."

"What's that?" cried Patsy, in amazement.

"Yes. There was a fellow 'hooking on behind,' as the boys say. I saw him drop off the running-gear and slip across the street. He hid in the corner of Bronson's steps—in the shadow."

"Whew!" whistled Patsy. "We'd ought to have looked into it."

"No time now."

"The old lady is worth real money, they say. Mebbe she's got plenty in the house. Jewels, mebbe. What's the matter with Danny looking into it?"

"We'll mind our own business just now, young man," said Chick sharply. "And we haven't got time to tell Danny, anyway."

"Humph! Just the same, when we come back, I'm going to have a hunt for the fellow who rode with them unbeknownst," muttered Patsy.

They hurried on to Fifth Avenue, and to the door of the jewelry-store. The place was in half-darkness, and the young man who had been sent to Nick Carter's house stood just within the door, waiting for Chick and Patsy. He let them in and then closed and locked the front door again.

There was a little group of worried-looking clerks standing half-way down the long room, talking in low tones. They were dressed for the street, but were evidently being detained until the atmosphere of suspicion cleared up a little.

"Mr. Knapp is waiting in the office for you," whispered the messenger to Chick.

"Come on!" said Chick to Patsy.

They were quickly introduced into the private office, and found a small, deaconlike-looking man, with a ruddy face and well-trimmed side-whiskers. He had little, black, sharp eyes, and his lips were merely a slit in his countenance, they were so tightly pressed together.

"Which of you is Mr. Carter?" he snapped, looking from one young man to the other, and in evident suspicion.

"I am," said Chick coolly.

"You are *not* Mr. Nicholas Carter. I have had dealings with him. Where is he?"

"I am Chickering Carter, Mr. Carter's first assistant. This is Mr. Garvan, likewise a trusted associate of Mr. Carter," said Chick quietly, but dodging the main issue.

"And why did not Nicholas Carter come himself? Did I hear something a few weeks ago about his being ill—or going away——"

The little man's eyes narrowed, and his forehead was corrugated with a puzzled frown.

"You are quite right, Mr. Knapp," declared Chick composedly. "Therefore, if you desire any service a detective can render, and wish to patronize Mr. Carter, you must be content with us—for the present."

"Well! well! I have no faith in the police. I've seen them work too many times. And I have heard that Mr. Carter has trained his assistants well."

"Thank you," said Chick, still composedly.

"Now, young man—young Mr. Carter! Here is the proposition: Some time between the hours of six o'clock and eight this evening, a tray of diamonds was emptied in one of our windows. Every jewel has disappeared. They must have been swept off the tray in

a moment, and, of course, by somebody inside the shop."

"Not, of course, by an employé?"

"They are all trustworthy men, and fully bonded by the guarantee company," returned Knapp.

"What are the contributory circumstances?" demanded Chick quietly.

"I will tell you. It certainly was a bold robbery—and at a time when we were keeping open because of an added rush of custom. You understand that a 'rush of custom' in a store like this is not like a bargain-counter scramble at a department store?"

"Rather," admitted Chick, nodding.

"But at this time of year there is a good bit of trade. It is coming our way. We welcome it. Our rivals keep open until eight and nine o'clock. So do we. Very well! To-night there were a number of customers in. Some few my clerks know—know by name, by sight, by reputation—know all about them. They are beyond suspicion, you understand?"

"As much as any man is beyond suspicion," murmured Chick softly. "We cannot always figure on sudden and spontaneous temptation, Mr. Knapp."

"Pshaw! No, I suppose not. But we are talking of probabilities. My clerks have been searched to the last man—*and to their skins!* This is always agreed upon by men who come to work for us in the first place. At such a time every man is only too willing to free his skirts of any possible suspicion."

"Speaking of skirts," interposed Patsy, with a smile, "were there any ladies in here during the time you suggest the robbery must have taken place?"

"Yes," said Knapp, with a flash of his black eyes. "And, oddly enough, only one whom some one of the clerks did not know."

"A point there, perhaps, eh, Patsy?" suggested Chick, smiling at his young partner. "Or was that general curiosity on your part?"

"I might as well accept my honors modestly," returned Patsy. "But perhaps, for a reason you understand, Chick, I may have girls in my mind particularly to-night."

"We've had an experience with a warm member of the sex to-day, Mr. Knapp," said Chick, in explanation.

"A crooked one?"

"A very crooked one, indeed. Just out of the Tombs, but already in business with—I believe—her old partners in crime."

"Would this, by any chance, look anything like the lady you mention?" demanded Knapp suddenly.

He shoved a piece of paper which lay upon his desk under the eyes of the two young detectives. And more startled young men could scarcely have been found just then within the confines of Greater New York!

"Ina, or I'm a lobster!" exclaimed Patsy emphatically.

"A dead ringer!" ejaculated Chick, quite as profoundly impressed.

The drawing was a hasty, but very good pencil sketch, of Ina Corrette, the mysterious girl whom they had been following all the afternoon! There could be no doubt of it, despite the startling coincidence of the case. It was Ina without the shadow of a doubt!

"Where did you get that, Mr. Knapp?" demanded Chick, when he had regained his voice.

"Perkins drew it. Perkins is the young fellow I sent for you. He has some talent in sketching—taken a course from a correspondence school, I believe," said Knapp, drawing down the corners of his mouth.

This was as near to a smile as he ever got, it seemed.

"Mr. Perkins seemed to have plenty of idle time on his hands this evening," added Knapp, speaking in his nasty, sneering way. "While the other clerks were busy he found time to stand back here near the office and draw the face of a pretty girl who chanced to be keeping one of the chief clerks busy.

"Had Perkins been moving about—especially up near the front of the store, as he was instructed to do when not otherwise engaged, this robbery might have been nipped in the bud."

Now, as young Perkins stood by, in hearing of all this, as Mr. Knapp had not told him to go when he ushered into the office Chick and Patsy, it was all rather embarrassing. But it seemed to be Mr. Knapp's pleasant little way with his so-called "inferiors."

"Tell Mr. Carter about it, Perkins!" snapped Knapp, bringing his sharp eyes suddenly to bear upon the nervous clerk.

"Why—I—I didn't suppose the girl had anything to do with the robbery," blurted out poor Perkins.

"It seems that she had. At least, it seems possible from what these two gentlemen say. Tell them about her."

"Why, Mr. Noble waited on her. I noticed that her profile was very beautiful, and I undertook to sketch it. It didn't take five minutes, Mr. Knapp. And when the robbery was discovered I forgot all about her."

"She had gone out, then, of course?" queried Chick.

"Oh, yes, sir."

"I discovered the sketch and found out about the original of it," said Knapp quietly, "while Perkins was out. Noble tells me the girl kept him engaged from six-fifteen till nearly a quarter to seven. She bought a small locket for thirty-seven dollars; but she looked at much more valuable wares. She positively had no chance of taking the gems in question, for she was at no time near that window, and all the goods Noble showed her were back here in the store."

"Could anybody have reached the tray in the window without going behind the counter?" asked Chick.

"It would seem impossible. At least, not unless that person had phenomenally long arms. The tray was over next the wall—the farthest tray in the top row from the main floor of the room. Do you see my meaning?"

"Suppose we go out there and look at it," suggested Chick.

"Very well."

In solemn procession, Mr. Knapp leading, they went

to the front of the store, poor Perkins bringing up the rear.

Mr. Knapp went behind the counter. He showed the detectives that there was no way of getting behind the counter next to the window. One had to go down the room twelve feet to enter through a locked gate into the clerk's aisle.

The window, on the right of the door looking out, was partitioned from the standing-room of the store by a high, ebony-black wooden partition. There was positively no opening in this partition, even could a person standing outside of the counter have reached into the farther upper corner of the display-platform, and seized the tray.

Mr. Knapp illustrated where the tray had been. One of the clerks had sold a ring out of it valued at eight hundred dollars just before six o'clock. Another clerk swore to seeing him put it back. That tray could not be mistaken. It contained some of the most valuable gems in the collection of Belfer & Knapp. It was purposely kept far away from the plate-glass window so as not to tempt thieves.

If a thief had smashed the plate-glass window he would have had to thrust his body half-way into the broken casement to reach the jewelry that was missing.

"What do you think of it, Mr. Carter?" asked Knapp querulously.

"I think, first of all, that, aside from Mr. Perkins, and the clerk named Noble, whom you say waited on the girl, the other employes might as well be allowed to go home," said Chick quickly. "You declare their honesty is guaranteed. I have only to examine Perkins and Noble a bit."

"Then you accept the doctrine that this pretty girl whom Perkins drew has something to do with the robbery?" demanded Knapp.

"Very much to do with it—very much indeed," declared Chick. "What say, Patsy?"

"Has all the earmarks of Ina and her side-partner," grumbled Patsy. "Gee! Chick! remember that message on the curl-paper? If we'd been sharp we'd known they were about to pull off more than one touch!"

"Ah! but could we have guessed where the second stroke would come?" returned Nick Carter's first assistant, shaking his head.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE GIRL WHO TAPPED HER FOOT.

While Knapp went to tell the clerks they could go—saving Perkins and Noble—Chick and Patsy went behind the counter. The sloping platform of the show-window was covered with black velvet. There was no break in it. The wall on the right hand—next to the spot where the tray had lain—was of paneled wood—finished like the weathered oak so much in favor at present.

Chick tapped it with his knuckles and it sounded hollow. But that was not surprising. The whole sheathing here evidently stood out some inches from the brick partition. This was the side wall here and Perkins told them that it adjoined the next building and—altogether—was probably thirty-six inches thick, if not more.

"Here is Mr. Noble," said Knapp, returning with a second worried-looking young man—all the clerks Chick and Patsy had thus far seen seemed anxious. Evidently Mr. Knapp was not a pleasant man to get along with!

"I understand," said Chick, to the second clerk, "that you waited on the young woman Mr. Perkins chanced to sketch so nicely?"

"I did, sir," admitted Noble, looking askance at his employer as though to see if he was doing right in answering frankly.

Chick smiled and pursued his catechizing.

"I suppose there can be no mistake about Mr. Perkins' drawing being quite exact?"

"Oh, it's the dead image of the girl!" cried Noble.

"And then, there can be no doubt in our minds as to her identity," declared Chick calmly. "Now, did you notice anything about her?"

"How do you mean, sir?"

"Did she seem to wish to attract your attention to any particular part of the shop?"

"Oh, no, sir. We remained about half-way down the room, however, at that case yonder. That is where I usually stand."

"On this side of the room, eh?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

"She remained always on this side of the room?"

"Yes."

"Then from your position you could see the end of this aisle—the end of the window—all the time?"

"Indeed I could. That makes it all the stranger—the robbery, I mean. If it was done while I was waiting on her, I ought to have seen the thief."

"If he was visible, of course," commented Chick.

"Ha! Are we to have a fairy-story out of this?" demanded Mr. Knapp. "An invisible man, eh?"

"He seems to have been at the moment he took the gems," returned Chick grimly.

"Well, I'm sure," began Noble, "if the girl——"

"That's it; tell us something more about the girl," urged Chick.

"What do you mean?"

"Not about her looks. Was she attentive to her business—the buying of the locket?"

"Why—as attentive as most girls of her kind."

"What kind?"

"Sort of flighty *I* call 'em. Go from one thing to another. Never sure of their own minds. And, yes—she was nervous."

"Nervous?"

"Yes, indeed. She showed that plainly."

"Do you think you could tell the difference between nervousness and *fear?*" queried Chick blandly.

"Oh, she didn't seem frightened at all. And she wasn't bashful. She was simply nervous," Noble declared.

"Explain yourself further, please, Mr. Noble."

"Why—well, she showed her nervousness by tapping her foot. Yes! She tapped her foot almost continually."

"When you showed her something she disliked, or did not want?" queried Chick.

"Possibly. But she tapped her foot a good deal. And she must have had a plate on her shoe, or wore a very heavy sole."

"Why?"

"It sounded so loud."

"When she tapped?"

"Yes. You know, this is a quiet shop—usually. Her tapping was quite annoying. But I don't suppose she realized she was doing it. Nervous people do not know how much they make other people nervous," quoth the philosophical Noble.

"Perhaps not," said Chick dryly. "That is all you can remember, Mr. Noble?"

"I believe so."

"Did this girl go away hurriedly in the end?"

"Why—I—you might call it that, she did."

"Indeed?"

"She spent some time in making her selection of the locket. Then she looked at other goods. At last she said nothing suited her to-day, and she turned abruptly away without bidding me good evening or waiting to see if I *did* have anything that would suit her."

"There was no signal?"

"How do you mean, sir?"

"You heard nothing that might have given her the tip that her partner had turned the trick and she could come off duty?" demanded Chick, smiling.

"I declare, sir, I noticed nothing. I couldn't have imagined that pretty girl—so young, too—could be a crook."

"You want to wake up, Mr. Noble," snarled Knapp, with disgust.

"I am through with the witness," said Chick, smiling, and bowing to Mr. Knapp.

"Do you want this young ass, Perkins?"

Perkins blushed at the compliment.

"Mr. Perkins may be of use to us. He is known in the neighborhood, is he not? Perhaps you will lend him to us, Mr. Knapp?"

"And a bushel like him if I had the misfortune to have them under my control," growled the jeweler.

Chick first drew Patsy to one side and asked:

"What do you make out of it *now*, my boy?"

"Holy mackerel!" breathed Patsy. "It's my belief the two of them have been mighty busy since the girl got out of jail this morning. She certainly is a cleaner! Why, these jobs must have been planned while she was confined, and they took them up, one after the other, like Brown's cows! Huh! I'm thinking one thing, Chick."

"What's that?"

"Considering how busy they are, I wonder they didn't have another engagement between the bank robbery and this diamond touch. Gee! Chick, don't you think they wasted time?" and Patsy grinned broadly.

"We may learn later that they *have* been busy in another direction," returned Chick gloomily. "At least, they are about the slickest pair of criminals that it has ever been *my* fortune to meet."

"I—should—say! About eighteen thousand in cold cash at the bank, they told me; and something like forty thousand in stones here. It's a cinch they'll try to make a get-away with the whole biz."

"I am afraid that this spectacular exhibition of crooked work foreruns the complete disappearance of Miss Ina Corrette and——"

Chick hesitated.

"And who? What do you call him?" demanded Patsy.

"I'm inclined to be the more confident that Addison never lost his life in that fire. The seer of second sight is in this, Patsy. His plot to get control of Doctor Morray's great discovery having failed, he has turned his ingenuity as a criminal to the best account possible. The papers relating to Morray's wonderful theory and the machine which actuated the strange power, may both have been destroyed when Crummles' house was gutted. But the seer of second sight is alive——"

"And kicking very vigorously," interposed Patsy, shaking his head.

"And he's got a mighty smart confederate in Ina."

"Right you are, Chick!"

"Think of the coolness of that young girl—scarcely more than a child! Coming right into this store after running the risks she had this afternoon at the West Farms bank.

"She stood right here, signaling Addison——"

"With her foot-tappings?"

"Of course. In some way she communicated to him, by those nervous tappings, when the coast was clear."

"But, holy mackerel, Chick!" gasped Patsy, "how did he lift the sparklers?"

"That is for us to find out—that is the unknown quantity," returned Chick gravely, shaking his head.

CHAPTER IX.

HOW THE TRICK WAS TURNED.

But although Nick Carter's first assistant spoke so doubtfully, with him, as with his chief, action was everything. Sitting idly by and waiting for things to come to him was not the way Nick had taught his young men to do their work.

To be passive was all right on occasion. But as a usual thing the rule was, as things would not turn up of themselves, to get out and turn them up!

"Come on! let's get busy," Chick said, in his old

manner, after a moment. "You take a look through the cellar, Patsy. By the way, Perkins can stand here about where the girl stood—do you remember the spot, Mr. Perkins?"

"I can get very near to it, sir," replied the clerk.

"Stand there, then, and when Patsy goes below——"

"My goodness, Mr. Carter!" ejaculated Mr. Knapp, in his quick way. "We have full control of the cellar under this shop. There is a watchman there every night, and our detective goes down a dozen times a day. Nobody could have been in the cellar at the time the jewels were taken."

"You don't know that, Mr. Knapp," returned Chick bluntly. "You were not there yourself, were you?"

"Well—er—no."

"Then we'll search the cellar first. That girl signaled her confederate, or confederates, every time she tapped with her foot. No doubt of it. She is far from being a nervous piece of goods—I know that," declared Chick. "She has *nerve* enough in all good conscience—but no *nerves*. She's a bold one.

"Now that tapping was for business purposes only. You run along, Patsy. I'm going to bother you to draw the curtains around that show-window, Mr. Perkins. I want to make sure that no part of the platform was moved.

"There was a case some years ago on the Bowery where the burglar worked in the day-time like this, and made a drop at night under the jeweler's window platform. He reached up and swiped the goods in broad daylight, and got away without being discovered. This looks like something of the same game."

Knapp was not convinced, of course. He went back into his office and let them alone, however.

"That man gives me a chill," whispered Patsy to Chick, as he departed for the lower regions.

Perkins drew the shades so as to hide Chick's work from the street, and then went back to stand about where Ina Corrette had been while she had held Noble's attention.

Tapping his foot occasionally on the floor was all that Perkins could do, and he did this under difficulties. Knapp sat looking out of his office door with a most baleful light in his little black eyes. Mr. Knapp had evidently reached that point where he believed that there was mighty little difference between the idiocy of his clerks and that of detectives.

Chick, meanwhile, overhauled the window thoroughly. The platform on which the display trays were laid, could be lifted out in sections; but there was no trap through to the cellar. The flooring was as sound as a nut.

It did seem as though, unless the seer of second sight—if he was Ina's confederate—had possessed the power to make himself invisible, there was no way of his getting at the tray of diamonds without being caught in the act.

Surely no man could have entered the shop and deliberately walked around behind the counter and taken the gems without being observed by some one. Ridiculous!

"Yet there really seems no other explanation of the mystery," muttered Chick. "Ah! what's happened to Patsy, I wonder?"

His friend and partner came up from the cellar hurriedly and stopped an instant to speak with Perkins.

"Have you found anything, young man?" demanded Knapp, from his office.

But either Patsy did not hear the gentleman, or he intentionally ignored him. With the clerk he came swiftly forward to Chick's side.

"I've got an idea, Chick," he whispered.

"See anything below?"

"Not a thing. Heard Perkins tapping all right. Very plain, in fact. There seems to be telephone, or electric light wires, from one end of the cellar to the other, and these twang loudly when Perkins raps the floor with his foot. But that isn't to the point. The fellow wasn't under there when she beat time for him. At least, I don't see what he could do through a solid flooring like that. I've got an idea, however."

"Out with it, son!" urged Chick.

"Come on. Perkins is known next door."

"Humph!"

"Those wires go through the partition wall in the cellar—and just about under this front window. May be nothing in it," said Patsy, with a big wink. "But I——"

He hurried out, and Chick and Perkins followed. The next building was an old house, and, although devoted entirely to office tenants, had no elevator. The front stairway went right up beside the west partition—in other words, next to the wall of Belfer & Knapp's store.

"Hunt up the janitor," commanded Patsy, to Perkins.

The moment the clerk was out of the way, Patsy beckoned Chick around behind the stairway.

"Look at that! Just as I expected," he whispered. "A closet under the stairs—and locked, of course, Chick. We'll have it open."

"You're all right, youngster!" declared Chick. "I see your idea. I saw nothing in that wall that looked out of the way——"

"He had plenty of time to make his preparations," said Patsy seriously. "Maybe no burglar could have got into Belfer & Knapp's building at night. But *this* place isn't well guarded—you can bet on that! The janitor sleeps on the top floor—cheapest room in the house, of course, and the farthest away from this base of operations. Ah! here he is!"

The janitor appeared in the wake of Perkins. Chick explained their business.

"Mein gootness! you vant to get into dot gloset vedt? Nonsense! Nopody efer get into dot gloset."

"How's that?" inquired Chick blandly, and with a gesture keeping Patsy back.

"I ain'd got no key," declared the Dutchman, shaking his head vigorously.

"Who has got a key?"

"Nopody ain't."

"Sad! Why not?" demanded the still bland Chickering.

"Vot you vant in dot gloset?" demanded the janitor doubtfully.

"And why don't you want me to get into it?" was the counter-question.

"Say! Iss you from dot landlord, yet? Heh?"

"I've told you who we are. See here!"

Chick showed the badge he wore under his vest.

"Vell! vell!" exclaimed the much worried man. "I dond't vant to get into some trouble mit de perlice—heh? Undt I dond't vant to get into troubles mit mein landlord, aind't it?"

"Do you want us to break into that closet?" demanded Chick sternly.

"Vell, how else you do, heh? I got no key. I cannot open de door mit any key I find."

"Does the landlord know it?"

"Nein! nein!" exclaimed the Dutchman, who seemed fearful of his landlord and his job.

Patsy, who had been examining the lock closely, whispered to Chick:

"Somebody's been tampering with the thing. I can see that."

"What do you think?"

"That the lock has been taken off and another substituted. That's why the old Dutchy can't get into the closet."

Chick turned to the janitor with a grim smile.

"We don't want to queer you with your landlord: but the door has got to be opened. Shut your eyes, sir!"

Chick backed away, aimed his heel at the door just below the knob, and flung himself forward with all his weight. The blow was one long practised by both Nick and his chief assistant. It was quite sure to shatter or loosen the lock, although the closet door opened outward.

In this case the door was almost driven through the casing. Chick laid hold of the knob and yanked it open, without splintering the outer jamb and casing. The lock was a wreck.

"Mein grascious!" murmured the janitor, in much distress.

"That's all right, Dutchy," advised Patsy. "We'll see that you get into no trouble with your landlord."

Chick was already in the closet. He looked over his shoulder at Patsy.

"It's here," he said, in a low voice. "Send Perkins for the cop on the beat. Go in yourself and bring Knapp."

Then to the janitor he added quickly:

"Don't go away, my man. I want to ask you a few questions."

"Mein grascious! Vot is oop, heh? I dell you I know noddings apout it——"

"Don't talk so much without being questioned. It's better," returned Chick firmly. "You may, or may not, know anything about this affair, but you are in charge of the building."

"I aind't had dot gloset open in a month—no, sir."

"Why not?"

"Vell, I dond't use it. Nopoty use it——"

"Are you sure? Didn't you ever see anybody around here?"

"So hellup me! No, sir!"

"But somebody *has* been in here—and a good many times, too. This work was probably done at night," remarked Chick ruminatively.

He lit another match and looked deeper into the closet.

"And the scoundrel took no chances, either. He foozled your lock, but for fear you might get the door open, he probably carried away with him every scrap of brick and every dust of mortar, each time he retired. There is no litter here. Ah! here's a painted sheet of tin. It probably covered up the hole in the wall to fool anybody who *might* get into the closet. Anybody remain in this building at night?"

"Only me and mein wife," declared the frightened janitor.

"He had an easy time, then. Of course, he had a key to the outside door. Do you chain or bolt the door at night?"

"Vell, idt used to be so, sir. But not now."

"How's that?"

"Dot man vot hires de small office on the secondt floor, rear—*he* kicks mit me."

"Oh, he does! What does he kick about?"

"Because he cannot get in at six o'clock in de morning. Sometimes he comes earlier."

"He's sure an early bird. What's his name?"

"Mr. Camelford."

"Sounds nice enough to be an alias," muttered Chick. "Is he here now?"

"He iss gone."

"For the night?"

"No, no! He iss gone forefer."

"That's a long time."

"He gafe up his key and took oudt his desk and chairs to-day."

"How long was he here?"

"Two mont's only. He was a pad tenant."

"What did he look like?" demanded Chick.

But the description the janitor was able to give was no clearer than mud. By and by Knapp came in with Patsy. They brought a hand-lamp and the interior of the closet was thereby lighted.

"This is how your gems were taken, Mr. Knapp," said Chick briskly. "The thief labored here for some time. It took several nights, of course, for him to work his way through the two brick walls and the plaster. When he got to your board partition in the window he did a job of joiner's work that is really marvelously perfect.

"He must have been in your store dozens of times,

to get the style of woodwork so perfect. He cut out a panel and had another already to fit into place—you see, it is held in place here by these snaps.

"The panel he sawed out was, because of the sawing, too small to put back. The aperture all around it would have been noticed. So he put in this panel instead, and nobody in your store noticed it.

"Then, when the plan was ripe, and he had his confederate ready—I am convinced I know her and that he could not have had her assistance until to-day—he slipped into this closet at dark, waited to hear her tapped signals which the twang of the wires brought into this building, and pulled off the trick without being discovered.

"He thrust in his arm and seized the stones—probably if his arm was seen from outside the window the observer thought it was a clerk reaching in from the aisle behind the counter. Very clever, Mr. Knapp—very clever."

"And what can you do about it?" demanded the jeweler, scowling.

"We'll get the man—and the girl," declared Chick firmly.

"Sure you know them?"

"I am, sir."

"And when shall I hear from you?"

"When the gems—or the thieves—or *both*—are captured," declared Chick.

"And how about this fellow?" demanded Mr. Knapp, staring at the trembling janitor.

"I don't think he is in the least guilty. He's only a fool," whispered Chick.

Perkins and the police officer appeared. Chick put the matter in the patrolman's hands, as far as notifying him of the break through the partition wall. Knapp said that his own watchman would do the rest. And there would be a scene for the German janitor with his landlord on the morrow!

Then Chick and Patsy departed.

CHAPTER X.

THE MYSTERIOUS MESSAGE.

But they were not happy. Far from it!

Two crimes had been committed this day. Chick and Patsy were both sure that they had been done by Ina Corrette and her partner. They had been too late on both occasions to catch the clever criminals.

The detectives had discovered how the crimes were committed, and were positive with regard to the criminals; but they had no idea whatsoever as to how Ina and the seer of second sight were to be found.

Both felt that they were up against a stone wall. Neither young man liked to admit it, and they said mighty little to each other on their way home.

Patsy had not forgotten about the man Chick had seen tagging on behind Mrs. Matilda Freyhuysen's carriage, their next-door neighbor. But when they passed the stoop where the stranger had hidden he only gave the dark and empty space beside it a passing glance.

There was something greater in his mind than *that* small matter.

Where was Ina Corrette? Where was Professor Addison, so-called?

Had they made these two big "touches" and then got out of the city—out of the country itself, perhaps?

"I'm dead tired," grumbled Patsy, as they went into the darkened house. "Anything more doing to-night?"

"I'm sure I don't know *what*," returned Chick, in no cheerful tone.

"Unless Ina and her running mate cut up some more didoes before we can go to bed—eh?" chuckled Patsy. "I'm going to pound my ear. If you see Joseph tell him to be on the job at six in the morning. I know I'll have to be hauled out of bed and chucked under a cold spray to wake me up!"

It was already near midnight, and Chick was wearied himself. But he knew he could not sleep. His main dependence now was upon Nick's getting the message he had put in the *Herald* personal column early, and would meet him at the Union Dime Bank on his first round at eight o'clock.

He needed Nick's help. Chick felt that he was pretty nearly at the end of his rope. It was all right to discover *how* these crimes had been accomplished, and to be pretty positive concerning the identity of the criminals; but he felt that something should be done mighty quick to stop Ina and Addison in their career.

They seemed to have set out to make a record as crooks, and surely Addison had been utilizing all his time very sharply during these days that Nick Carter's assistants had believed the seer of second sight buried under the ruins of his up-town house!

All he had waited for was Ina's release to put into execution plans for robberies that must have, according to what Chick and Patsy had learned to-day, been laid out weeks—perhaps months—before.

Besides wishing to get into his hands the wonderful discovery of Professor Morray, Addison had set out on a career of general crime. He was after money—easy money. And in Ina Corrette he certainly had a most excellent and nervy assistant.

Chick went toward the office, entering through the front room on the second floor, and so into the space behind the screen which masked that end of Nick's big office. There was a faint light burning here, and Chick came well-nigh stumbling over Joseph, Nick's valet.

"Hullo! what's the matter?" demanded Chick.

Joseph was white-faced and trembling. It was a moment or two before he could speak. Then he blurted out:

"Is—is that you, Mr. Chick?"

"Of course it is. What's the matter with *you*, Joseph? I declare! You look scared to death."

The valet was gradually recovering himself; but his countenance remained pallid.

"I—I can't just say, sir," he muttered.

"You tell me what's bothering you, old man!" exclaimed Chick, eying him closely. "Don't chuck any bluff, Joseph. It won't work. Ha! you were looking through the peep-holes, were you?" and Chick pointed to the screen where two apertures had been made at the height of a man's eyes. Sometimes Nick Carter desired to have his visitors examined unobserved by his assistants.

"Yes, sir. I——"

"What for?"

"I—I scarcely know, sir. I chanced to be in here—for a book that I remembered had been left out of place by Mr. Garvan. And when I was here——"

"Well?"

"I—I just *had* to look into the room," and Joseph jerked his thumb toward the office.

"Why did you *have* to?"

"I couldn't tell you, sir. I felt so impressed."

"Humph!"

"I know it sounds ridiculous, Mr. Chick," murmured Joseph.

"I want to know more," said Chick, eying him seriously. "What frightened you?"

"Was I frightened, sir?"

Joseph was in a measure recovered now. His eyes fell before Chick's keen gaze, and he evidently tried to appear at ease.

"I should say you were badly frightened, Joseph," declared Chick coolly. "And before we go any further—before either of us go to bed—you're going to tell me all about it. Come in here and sit down."

Chick had some of Nick Carter's influence over the valet. And he spoke now in a tone that Joseph realized "meant business."

Chick slid open the door of the screen wall and stepped into the big office. It was empty, and a bar of moonlight was all that illuminated the desk.

Chick walked over to the table, lit a gas-jet in the chandelier, and sat down in Nick's big chair.

"Come on, Joseph. Let's hear about it," he said.

"Mr. Chick, you will think I am in my second childhood—in my dotage," said Joseph, flushing a bit now.

"Well?"

"I—I believed I saw somebody in the room here. Yes, sir. Sitting in that very chair you are now occupying."

"Hullo!" ejaculated Chick, starting upright. "Nick?"

"It—it *did* look like Mr. Carter, sir," stammered Joseph. "I—I was startled enough."

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Chick. "You don't suppose he's in the house—not *really?*"

"It—it wasn't a real man I saw," whispered Joseph, shaking his head.

"What?"

"No, sir. It was not a human being—not a flesh-and-blood body, Mr. Chick."

"Nonsense, Joseph!" cried the amazed Chick.

"That's what I say, sir. It *was* nonsense. I knew you wouldn't believe it."

Joseph looked positively relieved.

"A ghost?" laughed Chick.

"Well, sir, it seemed to be sitting where you are now. The moonlight was shining on the table and I thought it was writing—just as Mr. Nicholas Carter looks sometimes, sir. And then, when I looked again it was gone—faded, sir. Just as though it had dissolved while sitting in that chair."

"Writing, eh?" queried Chick slowly.

Involuntarily he glanced at the desk table at his elbow. A loose sheet of paper lay on the blotter. He had not noticed it before.

"Yessir. I suppose I have been thinking so much of Mr. Carter that my mind called up the vision. It startled me, Mr. Chick—I admit it. But, of course, there was nothing in it, sir."

Chick was staring straight down at the paper. It was a minute—almost—before he made any rejoinder to the valet. He seemed to have been dreaming.

"Quite right, Joseph. Of course, there was nothing in it," he finally said.

"Just so, sir. Now, can I do anything for you, sir, before you retire?"

"Nothing, Joseph. By the way, call Patsy at six."

"And you, sir?"

"I shall probably not need calling. I do not feel sleepy—not now. Good night, Joseph," said Chick, continuing to stare at the paper on the desk.

It lay there in the attitude of a sheet that might have been made ready to be written upon. But the only visible mark was a tiny dash, cross, dash (- x -) in the upper left-hand corner.

It was that apparently innocent and meaningless mark—in red ink—that had held Chick's attention. He stared with puzzled brow at it until Joseph had softly left the room.

Apparently he had paid little attention to the valet's "vision." But as a matter of fact this ghostly apparition of the chief had taken a strong hold upon Chick's imagination—especially in connection with the attitude it had assumed.

A man writing at Nick Carter's desk. A ghostly appearance that—in a moment—disappeared into thin air—melted before Joseph's very eyes! At least, that had been the first startling impression made by the vision on the valet.

Chick knew that Joseph was a man of steady nerves and mighty little imagination. Although so typically a perfectly trained servant, the valet was keen-witted and brave.

There was something in this vision!

Chick had refused to admit the impression the story had made on his own mind. When once alone, however, he sat back in his chair with a sigh, and stared earnestly at the blank sheet of paper.

A ghostly hand, if engaged in the transcription of a ghostly message, would naturally leave no visible trace upon real paper!

Ah! but there was the "- x -"!

To Chick that odd little assemblage of marks was

not a thing of small moment. It was a sign with which he was more or less familiar—and had been for years.

He could not remember of leaving such a sheet of paper lying here when he was last at the desk himself. He was sure that he had not drawn that - x - himself. And he believed that neither Patsy nor Danny had done it.

Had the ghost of Nick Carter begun to transcribe something on the paper and had got no further than this, their private sign, before being disturbed?

Suddenly Chick's eyes flashed. He had thought the matter out. Leaning across the table he turned on the gas in the student-lamp. He held the palm of his hand against the green shade until it became uncomfortably warm. Then he picked up the sheet of paper and held that in a similar position.

He watched it attentively. The paper was ordinary writing bond of good quality—it was a sheet taken from a pile lying on one corner of the table. There was nothing peculiar or sensitive about the paper itself, Chick well knew.

Now that it was laid against the warm shade it began to curl a little, and at one spot grew a little brown. But not a trace of writing appeared upon it—only the "- x -" in the upper left-hand corner.

Chick was quite familiar with the so-called ordinary "invisible" ink which "shows up" when the paper on which it is used is heated; but *this* was not it.

The puzzle tangled up Nick Carter's chief assistant in a hard knot for some minutes. He raked his mind carefully for some shred of an idea that might explain the mystery.

Was there something written on that paper, or was there not? Had Nick Carter in the flesh been in the house, or had it merely been an ocular illusion of old Joseph's?

The thing that kept Chick hung up in the air over this decision was that little private mark, known only to Nick and his assistants, which adorned the upper left-hand corner of the paper.

Why should it have been put there if nothing more was written on the paper? And who had done the thing?

Chick sat with the sheet of otherwise blank paper in his hand and stared at it with corrugated brow. And as he did so there came into his mind a sudden thought about the paper—a discovery that he had not noted at first.

The casual observer would never have noted a thing out of the way regarding the sheet of paper. But to Chick's eyes it had suddenly assumed a peculiar gloss. There seemed to be a shine to the white paper that the other sheets did not have.

He reached for another from the pile hard-by and compared them closely. It was a fact! This sheet marked "- x -" had been originally out of the same ream as the others; but it now had a much different surface. It was glazed in some manner.

Chickering Carter was something of a chemist, and he knew instantly that the sheet of paper he had first picked up had been sensitized in some way. What for?

Ah! that was the question. And yet, it was *not* a hard question, Chick believed. A communication—a secret communication—was to be written. The paper had been prepared and in such a way that, after the lines were written, they became invisible in drying.

He arose quickly at this decision and went to the bathroom on this floor. Allowing the warm water to run in the large basin he finally floated the sheet of writing-paper upon its surface.

There was a wait of several moments, while Chick eyed the paper as though fascinated. But no line of writing appeared.

He carefully plucked out the sheet and turned it over, wetting the other side.

Suddenly Chick uttered a smothered exclamation. Through the wet paper he could see faint, fibrelike lines appearing. Wet as it was the paper was now semi-transparent.

The lines grew—extended—formed letters—then words! He had solved the secret; the mysterious message was within his grasp!

CHAPTER XI.

THE WONDERFUL RAY.

Two long, semi-dark, heavily furnished apartments, arched widely at their partition, and running from front to back of the second floor of a certain New York house; it was late at night and the house was still—very still. The halls outside these two rooms were more gloomy than the rooms themselves; and the front apartment is dim enough in all good conscience!

The rear room had one good light—a globe, shaded so that the strong light was shot down upon a broad, rough table, upon which stood a complicated arrangement of wheels, steel bars, magnets, and a tank from which a glass, or crystal, tube ran to an aluminum bulb—like an overgrown soap-bubble hanging from a child's blow-pipe.

There was a shifting mechanism around the bulb, by which a concave mirror, or reflector, could be changed from point to point about the aluminum bulb, without interfering with the tube of glass.

To enter into further description of the mechanical arrangement of the apparatus, saving to say that wires from a powerful dynamo in the cellar connected with the machinery, and that the force, or power, thrown off by the mechanical appliance was drawn to, and was made to act upon the contents of the tank, would merely be to tangle the reader's mind with technicalities that have no bearing upon our story.

But the two individuals—the sole individuals in this house awake at the time, or who knew that this strange mechanism was here—have *much* to do with this tale.

One was a tall, strongly built man, but rather thin. He had thin, long hair, too, and it was intensely black. A little manipulation with the proper powders and pomatum and that long hair would become silvery-white. An artistic touching up of the smooth face, and it would appear twenty years older than it really was —*if the owner so willed!*

His companion was a small, graceful, fairylike creature—half-girl, half-woman, with a dark, beautiful face, and the most demure expression in the world. An enemy might say that the expression of Ina Corrette's tranquil features suggested that of the cat who had just swallowed the canary.

But that she was beautiful, and petite, and quite self-contained, nobody could deny.

"A good day's work, Ina; a splendid day's work," the man said quietly, but with a world of satisfaction in his tone. "You are a wonderful child, Ina."

"I am glad you give credit where credit is due, Eugene," was her reply, stifling a yawn. "You could not easily get along without *me*."

"And your incarceration has not quelled your vanity," he returned, with some dryness.

"Why should it?" she queried, opening wide her beautiful eyes.

"Your vanity carried you into jail, young lady," he said.

"Indeed?"

"Did it not? You need me quite as much as I need you—no doubt of it. You certainly pulled off the robbery of those Kennans of the jewels very handsomely. But you couldn't keep the jewels, and you couldn't save yourself from arrest."

"Ah!" she said, frowning. "And that has always puzzled me, as I tell you. How Chick Carter found me——"

"There's more than that that bothers me," ground out her companion, with suddenly clenched fist. "I told you what a success and what a failure I had while you were—er—well, detained.

"Think of it, Ina! I had in my possession the very papers of that old devil, Morray. I had the whole thing in my own hands—the one living man capable of putting this great and wonderful thing into operation," and he gestured at the mechanism on the table.

"It was all mine—all! all! I had the machinery, and in those papers was the secret of the discovery—the formula of this wonderful chemical compound of which but a little now remains in the bottom of that tank, Ina.

"Oh, it is maddening! Given a few hours in safety to examine the papers I would have accomplished my intention. But no! the papers fell into no other hands, however. Though I have not the secret of this wonderful ray, no other living man has it!

"And a few such turns as we have made to-day and—— Pooh! it will not matter about this," and he pointed again at the machine. "Those diamonds will sell for a small fortune in Holland. The money from the bank will add materially to our hoard in the safety deposit vaults."

"But these have been costly raids, Eugene," said Ina, with another yawn. "There are too many 'props,' as the stage folks say. It costs too much to set your stage for the acts."

"But we must prepare——"

"Ah—must we?" she inquired, tossing her head. "Look at my appearance as the lady bandit. What preparation was there *there?* That is *my* idea of pulling off a thing. See a chance; seize a chance; get away with it."

"Bah!" returned her companion, with some heat. "How could such methods have worked for us to-day? Suppose I had not hired a professional burglar to get into that rude bank and saw through most of the screws in that screen? We'd never have got the cash to-day.

"And I was ten times in that next building next to Belfer & Knapp's before I got the hole dug through the walls, to say nothing of fitting the panel, and all the other work. You talk foolishly, Ina. Work and patience pays. You secured the Kennans' gems by a fluke. But you lost them."

"By no act of my own," declared the girl, heatedly.

"Right!" gritted he. "There seems to have been some malign influence against us there. Ah! and at other times, too. I was able for a while to balk that Nick Carter, every step he took; but now—I do believe that since we saw him, with our own eyes, laid in his grave, his influence for evil has been with us!"

"You are getting superstitious, Eugene."

"I am getting suspicious, you mean, Ina."

"Of what? You disbelieve your own eyes? the doctor's report? the funeral—all?"

"Why hasn't his business been closed up?" growled he.

"I fancy that this Chick Carter, and Garvan, and the others, want to make a good thing out of Nick Carter's clients. That's plain enough."

"Possibly. But I've a mind— a *good* mind—to have that grave opened."

"Nonsense! I touched the man's face myself. I know that it was a flesh and blood body in that coffin, and that it was either Nick Carter himself, or one who is so perfectly like him—without an atom of disguise—that their own mother could not have told them apart," cried Ina vigorously. "Eugene! nothing less than the ghost of Nick Carter could convince you that he is in the spirit world, I do believe!"

"Aye, that may be," grumbled the man. "But here! I must risk one more attempt with the ray to-night. We know Chick and Patsy were called to Belfer & Knapp's. They must return soon, and we must know what they have learned and what their future intentions are. They may discuss the matter."

He began to manipulate the various switches about the mechanism with quick, nervous hands. He turned on the electric power from the cellar; there was a slight, whirring noise as the machine got to running, but that quickly died away, and except for the flashing wheels and bars one would never have supposed the mechanism was in motion. It was so perfectly ballasted that not a tremor was communicated to the table on which the machinery stood.

"Now!" breathed the man. "Look out for the reflector. Watch the indicator closely."

Ina rose and came forward. As though quite used to this marvel she quickly and deftly manipulated the reflector so that—if there were light in the aluminum bulb—it would be reflected upon the side wall of the room.

He turned the power generated and held in leash by the magnets into the coils that ran to the tank. There was a faint sputter and then, for a moment, a slight, stifling odor, which almost immediately passed away.

Something in that tank—the mysterious compound which the dead and gone Doctor Morray had invented —was being fused.

Both watched the glass tube. It glowed gradually with heat from the tank, yet it did not become malleable in the least. By and by Ina sighed—a quick, expectant in-drawing of her breath.

Into the tube from the tank crept a brilliant yellow streak—like molten gold running through the vent. Yet it was not the color of gold—nor of sunlight—nor just like any other yellow in the heavens or on the earth!

It crept farther and farther, filling the core of the glass tube which, although it must have been of only hairlike proportions, seemed to swell and glow to magnificent size.

The yellow liquid at last reached the joining of the glass tube and the aluminum bulb. The instant it did so, thrusting forward into the bulb its fiery light, that altminum ball became suddenly transparent!

The bulb seemed to expand and palpitate with the power transferred to it. Out of the mouth of the tube, inside the neck of the bulb, hung a tiny, beadlike drop of the yellow, liquid light.

Another bead followed from the hairlike core of the tube and pushed the first bead into the vacuum. The first bead did not fall—rather it floated down through the space inside the bulb—drifting in it like thistledown, yet retaining all its own individuality of form and illuminating power.

And now a more wonderful thing was manifested. The reflector behind the bulb threw the concentrated rays of the yellow light upon the wall of the room.

As the beads of liquid fire dropped from the tube—or rather were exuded therefrom, and went floating about the ether of its interior—the circle of illumination cast against the opaque wall became more strongly outlined. Its circumference must have been greater than twenty feet. The line of it became a hoop, as well defined as though it were an iron ring imbedded in the wall.

For, as the beads increased in number and the power of the ray grew, that wall, inside the circle, seemed to *melt away!*

A picture hung there—part in, part out of the magic circle. That part which was in the circle of reflected light, disappeared. The wall behind it grew clouded, the wall paper figure disappeared, and gradually naught but a smoky space was visible within the abrupt confines of the mysterious circle of light.

The man and woman at the machine watched the space—and the beads of yellow liquid, alternately, and with breathless attention. They did not speak; they did not move; they scarcely breathed.

In the smoky space now appeared—slowly and with growing clearness—outlines of objects. In time a

room was displayed—as though in a picture, or thrown upon the screen of a stereopticon.

The room displayed was long, plainly furnished, and devoid of any ostentation. A big, flat-topped desk and a comfortable desk-chair, with a book-case or two, and a high steel cabinet with rolling curtains, were the principal articles in the room.

Anybody who had even seen Nick Carter's study and office would have at once recognized this picture.

The room was displayed in its entirety—just as though one side of the apartment were cut off. Even the space behind the false partition was shown.

It was night. There was no lamp in the room of the vision. Through a high window-blind a single ray of moonlight entered and was cast across the writing-table.

As the outlines became more exact there was a sudden movement in the picture. The door of Nick's office opened—was pushed inward—and a figure entered.

The figure was that of a man, draped in a long, peculiar, black garment—more like a shroud than aught else, only somber of hue. A cloth, like a turban—perhaps such a cloth as those who prepare the dead for burial, sometimes use—was wrapped about his head. It shrouded his features completely.

The figure shut the door and approached the table and chair, standing fair in the center of the picture. He seated himself at the desk, in the big chair, and then turned so that he faced the man and woman standing so breathlessly at the mechanism.

They could see only his eyes—dark, penetrating, somber—and a small portion of his forehead. He raised his hand and began slowly to unwind the ghastly cloth from about his head!

And as he unwound the cloth, a part came away from under his chin. His lower jaw dropped a little—*like the jaw of a dead man!*

The countenance was gradually unclothed—gray, expressionless—seemingly almost fleshless—just as though colorless skin had been drawn over the angles of the bones.

It was a death's head, at which those two criminals looked—*but it was recognizable.*

For an instant the man tore his gaze from the horrid picture and his eyes were bent upon the girl. She stood as though rooted to the floor, but her hands resting on the switches of the mechanism, never trembled.

She saw her companion's look. She realized that his lips formed the words:

"Nick Carter!"

But she did not reply; she could not reply.

The apparition turned slowly to the desk. His bloodless hand reached out from the enshrouding cloak and seized a pen. He drew a sheet of paper toward him. He wrote.

The man and woman could see every movement he made. They could see the pen tracing its way swiftly over the surface of the paper. But they could see no mark left by that pen!

Once the hand dipped the pen seemingly in the open inkwell. Then it hurried on over the paper, until the sheet was well filled—apparently—with the written words. But not a line was visible!

The ghost of Nick Carter sat up, threw down the pen, seized a blotter, and used it on the apparently written words as though they were really visible.

It was at this juncture that Ina Corrette uttered the first audible word since the scene began.

"Eugene!" she cried, in a hard, dry, painful whisper.

Her companion glanced at her, then to a part of the vision which he had overlooked.

Behind the screen—the false partition—in Nick Carter's room was the figure of Joseph, the valet. He was peering through the peep-holes, which were really the half-veiled eyes of the picture of the Greek slave-girl hanging against the wall.

Every action and appearance of Joseph showed his terror and amazement at the apparition in his master's chair. They saw Joseph fall back from the peep-holes, his hands covering his eyes. Then the figure of Nick Carter rose and——

Ina uttered a scream and fell back from the mechanism. Her partner sprang to catch her ere she fell. Her wonderful nerve had at last given way. He himself was shaking and trembling—totally undone.

He laid her on a couch, he ran up the room for water. As he turned to come back he saw that the picture on the wall was becoming clouded again. He glanced into the bulb. The yellow beads had ceased to exude through the tube. The yellow fire was paling. The wonderful ray was dying down.

Forgetting the girl for the moment, the man ran to the machinery. He tried switch after switch. The mechanism was running perfectly. The full charge of the voltage was coming into the machine. The wonderful energy was being stored in the magnets. This energy was being sent by recurrent charges into the sealed tank.

But there was no more fire in the tube. It was rapidly dying out of the aluminum bulb. The picture faded, and naught but a circle of semi-illumination was cast upon the wall of this room. Nick Carter's office and all that was going on within it, had disappeared.

The man uttered a cry—a cry of despair and rage that echoed like a howl of a ravening beast throughout the rooms. He smote his forehead with his hand and cried aloud again:

"The end! the end!" he wept.

Then he sank down—like the girl—beside the wonderful mechanism. The yellow ray was dead. The light was lost. The last atom of Doctor Morray's mysterious compound had been expended, and the great discovery was lost again the abyssmal gloom of the world of experiment.

CHAPTER XII.

BACK FROM THE GRAVE.

And it was no ghostly message that Chick Carter read when finally the hidden lines were made plain to him. It was very practical, and to the point, and was written unmistakably in Nick Carter's own hand:

"Don't rouse the boys. Go out yourself and communicate with the inspector. Have him furnish you at least six trustworthy men, and put the captain of this precinct wise to the fact that we may need the reserves. Meet inspector's men outside and bring them here. Be as quick as possible, for I shall be back before sun-up and there is big game afoot.—NICK."

Not for a moment did Chick doubt the validity of these instructions. He knew his chief's handwriting—as well as his chief himself—too well.

The assistant could not imagine what the outcome of the orders would be; yet the reference to "big game" could mean nothing but Addison and Ina Corrette. They were the only big game now being stalked in the jungles of crookdom.

Noting Nick's particular instructions, Chick said nothing to Joseph, as well as to the others, but put on his hat and coat again and left the house.

He went to a place where there was a telephone booth and called up the inspector, stating the emergency and not mentioning the fact that there was likely to be an explosion very soon when Nick Carter once more appeared in the land of the living. Even the inspector thought that the great detective was no more.

In two hours Chick returned to the house, with the six men from the central office in tow. It still lacked an hour of sunrise, but Joseph met them at the door with a countenance that told nothing. He thrust into Chick's hand a bit of paper which the assistant read, smiled over, and then burned at the gas-flame.

"Gentlemen," he said softly, to the six plain-clothes men, "you are about to be surprised."

"Is that all it is—a surprise party?" asked a facetious one.

"Something a little more strenuous—in the end—perhaps. But I am going to surprise you now. You all know my chief, Mr. Nicholas Carter?"

There were stares and muttered words of surprise.

"I guess we all *knew* Mr. Carter," blurted out one.

"Then you will know him again," said Chick blandly.

"Thunderation! The man's gone crazy!" muttered one of the bulls hoarsely.

"Dead!" ejaculated another. "Why, I saw him in his coffin myself."

"You may *think* you saw him in his coffin," said Chick seriously. "But he is very much alive. He has never, in fact, been dead," and Chick chuckled grimly at that joke. "No time to explain now, gentlemen. He is waiting for us up-stairs in his office. You are about to assist in a round-up of criminals, and in the capture of one man in particular, whom Mr. Carter has had to *go through the grave* to get!

"But he's got him. He's got him dead to rights. He's come back from the grave to put that man behind prison bars. What's more, he will send him to the electric chair, if all goes well, for there is certainly one—possibly two—capital crimes to be laid at his door. Come up-stairs, gentlemen. Time is flying."

They found, as Chick had said—and as the slip of paper had told him—Nick Carter sitting in the flesh before his big desk, with the gratified Patsy and Danny—the former rather sleepy-looking—with him.

Nick listened to no exclamations, nor did he make any explanations. He gave each man his instructions concisely and abruptly.

When they had filed out—all six of them—to go to their stations—Nick turned to his assistants.

"We have a few moments," he said. "It is safe to talk plainly at last in this house. For weeks we could not do so. But I know with surety that we can now. The great discovery that Doctor Morray perfected will never be active again—not unless some other scientist rediscovers his theory and his chemical compound that fed his wonderful ray.

"I have indeed been living the life of a disembodied spirit most of the time since I found it was necessary to disappear into the grave. To tell the truth, I have lived underground.

"I joined forces with our wonderful and shrewd Professor Addison——"

"You mean Crummles?" suggested Patsy.

"You mean Eugene Siddel?" said Chick.

"Yes—and several other aliases, one of which may surprise you," and Nick smiled broadly.

"I joined forces with him, as an expert engraver. Underneath his house is a sub-cellar where a large coining establishment was carried on. The silver and gold stolen by the gang was melted down and coined so well that even the United States mint would be glad to take it, I fancy. At least, it comes pretty near sizing up to the government standard.

"And, unbeknown to Addison—or Eugene Siddel, which is, I believe, nearer his own name—I went all through his house and I saw the wonderful machine he constructed under Doctor Morray's orders, at work. Of that I will speak more fully to you later. That it was a most marvelous invention there can be no doubt," said Nick. "But it was a dangerous invention, too. Possibly it is well that the secret of our seer of second sight it will from this time forth remain a secret. *He* will never be able to do anything with the discovery, and neither will any other man.

"You fell down yesterday, Patsy, in trying to meet Ina when she came from prison, because Siddel could buy so much influence with his ill-gotten gains. But I was with him—unbeknown to him—all the time.

"Nearly all the time, I should say. I was not positive which of the tricks he had arranged to pull off would come first. They got to the bank in West Farms and robbed it before I arrived——"

"You were the foreigner that the waiter told me of at the road-house!" cried Chick. "The man who followed the motor-car on the trolley."

"Right. And you saw me again, I know—but did not recognize me."

Chick suddenly sat up and gasped.

"Is it possible!" he cried.

"Ah! I see you suspect at last what—had it not been done right under our noses—we would have found out weeks—aye, months ago," said Nick quietly.

"Is she——"

"Exactly. She *is*. Or, rather, *he is*. Eugene Siddel is a marvelous actor. He is a man of wonderful talent, anyway. Ina Corrette is his cousin and he has had the training of her since babyhood. Young as she is, she has become an expert and dangerous criminal—second only to Siddel himself.

"Now, I am going back to the rendezvous of the coiners and robbers—of whom he is the chief—to wait for the police to arrive. I will give you young men your instructions. Follow my words to the letter—as you always do. That is," added Nicholas Carter, with his slow smile, "if you want me to really come back from the grave!"

* * * * * * *

The sun was just showing a red and rather disreputable face over the roof tops when Chickering Carter rang at the front door of a most respectable-looking brownstone-front house on a most respectable block, in a most respectable neighborhood. The fact has often been mentioned that in New York one never knows who one's next-door neighbor is—whether he be good, bad, or indifferent. That may, or may not, be a good thing.

A sleepy housemaid opened the door, looked startled, then surprised, and then smiled and blushed at something which Chick said to her in a whisper. When he spoke aloud he asked for the lady of the house, stated that his business was urgent, and insisted on stepping inside.

The perturbed maid showed him to a reception-room and took his card up-stairs. When she came down she nodded to him and went back to the rear of the house, and so to the basement.

In ten minutes there was a step on the stairs—light enough, but not belonging to a woman. At least, the figure who appeared was that of a young man—almost a youth—wrapped in a sweeping bath-robe.

"What do you want?" he demanded crossly. "My aunt cannot come down. She is an old lady and does not rise at such an early hour."

"You don't say?" drawled Chick, who seemed to be listening intently.

"You're saucy, Mr. Carter!" exclaimed the youth.

"I am, my dear," admitted Chick.

"What do you want?" was the demand, as the speaker fumbled something in the folds of the robe.

"I want you to drop that little plaything you have there," said Chick quickly. "I have my own pistol trained upon you. I'd hate to shoot such a delicate little piece of furniture as you, my dear, but I shall shoot you before I allow you to shoot me! Understand?

"Don't look around for help. Your aunt is not able

to assist you. I know that you expect such assistance, but already my helpers have been let in from the back and she—*he* is in the hands of Nick Carter and his men!"

His last words had risen to a shout of exultation. He had heard a rush of footsteps in the hall, and a pistol-shot below-stairs. There seemed to be a roar of voices at a distance, too.

Chick sprang at the slight figure in the bath-robe, tore it away and revealed that underneath was a girl fully dressed—*the* girl, fully dressed, in fact, for it was Miss Ina Corrette.

"Bring in Auntie Freyhuysen, boys!" cried Chick, and in from a rear room appeared Eugene Siddel, or Professor Addison, between Patsy and Danny. He was already manacled.

"A pair of bracelets for you, too, my dear," said Chick, snapping them on Ina's wrists. "You will go up this time for sure! Old Knapp will surely prosecute, and so will the bank. No escape from the pen., and our friend here, the seer of second sight, ought to be able—with his remarkable occult power—to see his own finish. *I* can see it without the aid of spectacles, myself!

"Don't be afraid, Mr. Siddel *née* Matilda Freyhuysen. All your gay companions are in the hands of Nick Carter and the police below-stairs. And you might as well know that, instead of being in his grave, Nick has been working as one of your own understrappers, a good deal of the time since you saw him lowered into the earth.

"You'll punish no more traitors in your employ, however, as you did poor James. And anyway, the one who let Danny and Patsy in was only a pretty housemaid. You know, you didn't fear *her* friendliness with Nick Carter's chauffeur. It rather amused you.

"Here you have been for weeks occupying this house and looking in upon our private affairs whenever you wished by the aid of that wonderful ray of old Morray's. To establish yourself right next door to Nick Carter's residence was a daring thing to do. It was worthy of you—worthy of you both," and Chick bowed and smiled at their prisoners. "Ah! I hear the wagon. We'll all be going—a nice, early morning ride. And, by Jove! I never took a similar one with more satisfaction!"

Which feeling Nick Carter himself entered into fully. The long and complex case was finished. Every man connected with Siddel in his vast conspiracies, was captured. It was a general clean-up of a wonderfully dangerous crowd.

Nick Carter had gone down to the grave to accomplish the undoing of the man who had held, for a time, every advantage over the famous detective.

Siddel had been enabled, by aid of the marvelous machine, to see into Nick's office next door whenever he pleased—and to hear conversations carried on there.

In this way he had balked the detective's best efforts, and blindly—intuitively—Nick had taken the only way to best his wily enemy. He had appeared in all good faith to die and to be buried. Then, by making his assistants keep up the appearance of his demise, and never to allow them to speak of him as alive in the house, Siddel had been lulled into a condition of false security.

Meanwhile Nick had, as he said, worked underground. He had obtained entrance to the headquarters of the gang, and gained their confidence in the character of a crook like themselves.

His appearance as the ghost of himself during that last display of the wonderful power invented by Doctor Morray, had been thought of by Nick on the spur of the moment. It had been done to punish Siddel and the girl in some part.

Meanwhile, while posing as his own ghost, Nick had written his secret message to Chick, well knowing that his able assistant would discover the mystery shortly. And the writing of the message on the sensitized paper added to the ghastliness of his trick upon Siddel and the girl.

The wonderful invention of Doctor Morray was lost to the world. The machine is now stored in Nick's own cellar, but it will probably be many a long year before anybody discovers the compound from which was evolved the yellow, beadlike drops that possessed such marvelous power; although, on the sly, Chickering Carter in his laboratory has sometimes attempted experiments along that line.

As Chick had prophesied to Siddel and Ina Corrette, his cousin, the law gave them justly their dues. Murder in the first degree was proven against the man, and he went to the chair. On two counts Ina received respectively eight and ten years each. Half her life will have been spent when she gets out of the pen—unless the mawkish sentimentality of a thoughtless public works upon the enfeebled mind of some popularity-desiring governor, to pardon her before her time is up!

THE END.

The next number (622) will be "A Strange Coincidence; or, Patsy's Lucky Strike."

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SEA MONSTERS IN BATTLE.

Saguenay River, Canada, tourists seldom fail to observe off the mouth of the river—white and glistening—the broad, bright backs of big schools of porpoises. Frequenters of the various salmon rivers flowing into the lower St. Lawrence and the gulf are familiar with the same sight.

At almost any time when the fish are running into the rivers from the sea, the white backs of innumerable porpoises may be seen off the estuary patiently fishing in the deeper water of the entrance. Sluggish as they may seem in their methods, the nimblest salmon that comes their way will fall a victim to their inexorable jaws. As for the young samlets, stealing from their nursery to the unknown sea, on their first voyage, it is impossible to estimate the hordes of them that furnish food for the porpoises.

A pest in all waters inhabited by choice food fishes, and having an average market value of only about $30, no system has so far been invented to capture porpoises in sufficient numbers to make the attempt remunerative.

The search for a suitable food supply is probably not the only reason why they leave the sea for a good part of the year, by entering the St. Lawrence they are free for a time from hereditary foes. This means much, for great as the porpoise is in bulk and in powers of destruction, it is unfurnished by nature with the means of withstanding attack or of inflicting retaliative injury upon an antagonist of any standing in the mammalian kingdom. Escape, and that in the quickest way possible, is its only thought when threatened by danger.

In the soft tides of the St. Lawrence the fiercer cetacean is, for some reason, if not unknown, at least only a visitor at rare intervals. Even the almost ubiquitous shark is absentee, or but poorly represented by his scavenging relative, the dog-fish. In a realm so peaceful and fruitful, the porpoises forget their terrors and in the confidence begotten by numbers will hunt their prey to the very shore. In the shallow waters where the settlers have set nets to entrap the herring, these freebooters will devour the schools of meshed fish and then, in mere wanton attack, rend the nets.

But whether gorging or gamboling, these white scourges are rarely off guard. Their sense of hearing is remarkably acute. When, as is not infrequent, the waters are whitened by vast numbers of these invaders and the air is loud with the noise of their splashings and unmusical gruntings, at a faint sound in the distance their tumbling forms become rigid in an instant as they listen in eager attention. Then, as the sound becomes more distinct, they are away precipitately in undignified haste.

Their fiercest assailant is the black fish of the Gulf, sometimes known as the black dolphin, the black porpoise, or the gladiator. These dark-skinned warriors are inferior to the porpoise in size, being generally under ten feet in length. They are compact, muscular, swift in action, and born fighters.

As they rise to breathe you see only the deep, lustrous black of their back and loins, but a near view will disclose, like the sheathing of a yacht, a breast-plating as of burnished copper. The eyes of the white mammal are small and overhung; those of their black foe are large and, accentuated by a circle almost phosphorescent, have an appearance both startling and baneful.

They rarely ascend the St. Lawrence west of Pointe des Monts, in large numbers, though a scouting-party may occasionally be seen, and when they do arrive in force it is, as a rule, in a heavy easterly blow. They are easily known by the abnormal height of their dorsal fin, visible when the black warrior rises to breathe before a nearer approach reveals the polished, sinuous back. Mark well those high, thin-edged fins, for they are even as Toledo blades, ground for battle, to do duty at once as lance or saber. These sable swordsmen are the terror of the porpoises.

A duel to the death between single representatives of these mammalian tribes is not an unusual occurrence. It is invariably marked by great fury. The drama of an attack in battalion upon a host of enemies is one rarely witnessed, and, once seen, never to be forgotten. Such a scene was recently described to the writer by the captain of one of the river steamers running to the Labrador coast.

This captain declares that precautions are generally taken by the attacking-party so to be able to attack them in a location favorable for their methods, such, for instance, as certain partly closed-in bays. Into such places the porpoises are steadily forced until in shallow water and a confined area they are brought to bay, with a dark line of black fish in the offing still pressing steadily on in serried ranks.

As at a given signal or word of command, the charge is made at last, swift and compact, and into the writhing bodies of their victims those terrible fins are plunged till the waters are red to the very shore. For two long hours such a combat, witnessed by the captain above referred to, continued to rage.

OASES OF CHILEAN DESERT.

Northern Chile, which is so largely mountain or desert, is generally regarded as a forbidding wilderness, but in spite of its natural desolation, the landscape presents a scene of great beauty under the softened hues of sunset, and here and there in the waste of sand and salt may be found by looking for them a number of oases, the most conspicuous of which are Pica and Matilla.

These oases are supplied with water from the high Andes, but the particular streams that support their life are not certainly known. It has been found that in various parts of the great Atacama desert the earth underneath the surface layer of sand or salt is sufficiently moist to grow crops, capillary attraction spreading the water through the soil. The rainless Atacama desert is the scene of the greatest industry of its kind in the world, yielding enormous quantities of nitrates used to enrich the fields of Europe and the United States.

The oases play a very important economic rôle in the industries of the region, supply vegetables and foodstuffs for the support of workmen, alfalfa for the cattle, and various fruits, and also serving as timber-producers for the nitrate works, which require much fuel. There is no part of the world where agriculture is more intensively carried on than in these green spots in the Atacama desert.

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